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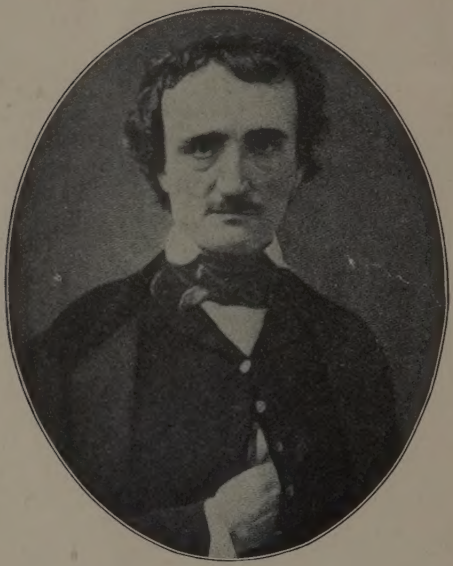

Edgar A. Poe.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"WHAT CAN LITERATURE DO FOR ME?"
"O. HENRY BIOGRAPHY," ETC.

EDGAR ALLAN POE

How to Know Him

BY C. ALPHONSO SMITH

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To

ARCHIBALD HENDERSON SCALES, REAR ADMIRAL, UNITED STATES NAVY, SUPERINTENDENT OF THE UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY

and

ARCHIBALD HENDERSON, HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED IN TOKEN OF SINCERE FRIENDSHIP AND IN MEMORY OF STIMULATING COMRADESHIP

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PREFACE

Poe has suffered a strange fate. Nobody ever doubted his genius, but his genius has clouded and rendered spectral and remote his personality. He is popularly regarded as a manufacturer of cold creeps and a maker of shivers, a wizened, self-centered exotic, un-American and semi-insane, who, between sprees or in them, wrote his autobiography in *The Raven* and a few haunting detective stories. This book is an attempt to substitute for the travesty the real Poe, to suggest at least the diversity of his interests, his future-mindedness, his sanity, and his humanity. Old-world voices are requisitioned to speak for him, and he in turn through the wide gamut of his work is permitted to speak for himself.

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EDGAR ALLAN POE

CHAPTER I

The World-Author

It is peculiarly true in the case of Edgar Allan Poe that to know him you must know more than the bare facts and dates of his life. These may be summarized as follows:

He was born in Boston, at what is now 62 Carver Street, on January 19, 1809, the triangle at Carver and Broadway having been recently named the Edgar Allan Poe Square. His mother, Elizabeth Arnold, a talented and beautiful English actress, had been early left a widow and in 1806 at the age of nineteen had married David Poe, Jr., a native of Baltimore. David Poe was also an actor but does not seem to have shared the rare gifts of his wife or to have inherited the sturdier qualities of his father, a hero of the American Revolution. "My father David died," writes Poe, "when I was in the second year of my age, and when my sister Rosalie was an infant in arms. Our mother died a few weeks before him. Thus we were left orphans at an age when the hand of a parent is so peculiarly requisite. At this period my grandfather's circumstances were at a low ebb, he from great wealth having been reduced to poverty. It was therefore in his power to do but little for us. My brother Henry he took, however, under his charge, while myself and Rosalie were adopted by gentlemen in Richmond, where we were at the period of our

parents' death. I was adopted by Mr. John Allan of Richmond, Virginia, and she by Mr. William McKenzie of the same place." When Mr. Allan died, in 1834, he had given Poe five years of schooling in England, from 1815 to 1820; he had sent him for one session, that of 1826, to the University of Virginia; he had placed him in his counting-house in Richmond; he had obtained his discharge from the army, in which Poe had enlisted at Boston in 1827; he had secured his appointment as a cadet at West Point, where he remained from July, 1830, to March, 1831; and he had continued to send a large enough remittance for his protégé to live on. It is to be hoped also that he had read with proper pride *The Ms. Found in a Bottle* with which his namesake had astonished the reading public of Baltimore the year before and won the hundred-dollar prize, this being the first public recognition of Poe's narrative skill.

Had Mr. Allan lived a year longer he would have seen Poe back in Richmond on a salary of eight hundred dollars a year as the editor of the great *Southern Literary Messenger*. Never again was his salary to be so large; but in 1837, Poe and his child-wife, Virginia Clemm, shepherded by Mrs. Clemm,

> "Dearer than the mother I knew
> By that infinity with which my wife
> Was dearer to my soul than its soul-life,"

began their pilgrimage to New York. From now till the end it was to be only a checkered Grub Street trail for Poe. He did not make his living by his stories or by his poems; he made it, such as it was, by critical hackwork done at odd times for journals and newspapers. He toiled terribly, for the cult of per-

fection drove or drew him in every task. After a year in New York they move to Philadelphia where they remain from 1838 to 1844. The last move was back again to New York. Here in 1845, on the appearance of *The Raven,* Poe found himself famous. But Virginia's death in 1847 and his own desperate illness dashed whatever hopes he may have had of ultimate happiness in the little Fordham home and another move is planned, that to Richmond. But the end came midway on October 7, 1849. After the harrowing termination of his engagement to Sarah Helen Whitman, of Providence, he had paid a happy visit of renewal to Richmond and was soon engaged to Mrs. Sarah E. Shelton, the Miss Royster of his university days. He was on his way to New York to bring Mrs. Clemm back to Richmond to attend the wedding and to share the joy of a settled home at last, when he was found unconscious at Ryan's Fourth Ward Polls in Baltimore and taken at once to the Washington Medical College. Early Sunday morning, wrote Doctor J. J. Moran, "A very decided change began to affect him. Having become enfeebled from exertion, he became quiet and seemed to rest for a short time; then gently moving his head, he said, 'Lord, help my poor soul,' and expired."

II

The story is pitiful enough if we end it, as men thought it was ended, on that October afternoon that saw Poe laid beside his grandfather at the corner of Fayette and Greene Streets. But to know Poe we must follow him not to his death but to his coronation

in 1909. That year marked his centennial, as it marked the centennial of Lincoln, Holmes, Darwin, Gladstone, Tennyson, Chopin, and Gogol. It was then that historians looked back over the century and attempted a fresh appraisal of the men who had now rounded out their first hundred years. If the name of Poe did not lead all the rest, it was surpassed by none in the interest awakened, in the international acclaim rendered, and in a certain recognized indebtedness for thought and vision and craftsmanship. At the University of Virginia, in Baltimore, in New York, in London, in Paris, in Madrid, and in Berlin, Poe's birthyear was celebrated by memorial meetings and centennial articles as the birthyear of no other American poet or prose-writer had ever been celebrated before.

"It is surely a somewhat striking fact," said *The Edinburgh Review,* for January, 1910, "that, of authors born in America, Poe is the only one to whom the term 'world-author' can with any propriety be applied." No, there are others. Franklin, Cooper, Emerson, Longfellow, and Mark Twain are world-authors; and Walt Whitman, Joel Chandler Harris, William James in a narrower sense, and O. Henry are fast becoming world-authors. But it is none the less true that the title belongs preeminently to Poe. His appeal as poet and story-teller, the universality of his themes, the purity of his style, his studied avoidance of slang and localism, his wealth of sheer intellect and his equal dowry of constructive imagination, together with his almost uncanny feeling for form and color, for the fitting melody and the enhancing background, these put him in a class alone, and these have

given him a recognition in foreign lands not equalled by any other American writer.

The story of his conquest of world opinion can be told only in outline. It is a story, however, more dramatic in interest than any that he himself wrote. The American is not to be envied who does not feel a patriotic pride in the career of an author who, if he could not lift himself above the handicaps of habit and ill health and poverty, yet drove through them, and gave to the outside world its first and most lasting conception of Americanism as literature. To know Poe one must know this larger story.

It was Russia, not France, that took the initiative in Europeanizing Poe's fame. "Casual translations from Poe," says Abraham Yarmolinsky,[1] "began to appear in leading Russian periodicals as early as the late thirties." But Poe knew nothing of this. Several years later he was called "an unknown writer" even in England. He had questioned Dickens about the prospects of republication in London, and Dickens had written as late as 1842: "The only consolation I can give you is that I do not believe any collection of detached pieces by an unknown writer, even though he were an Englishman, would be at all likely to find a publisher in this metropolis just now."

The popularity of Poe in Russia seems to have been continuous and cumulative. "The first name a Russian is most likely to mention," continues Yarmolinsky, "when the conversation turns to American literature, is that of 'mad Edgar.' It is Poe that has come to be popularly identified in Russia with the American literary genius in its highest achievements.

[1]See *The Bookman*, N. Y., September, 1916.

Poe's popularity in Russia is hard to overrate. He is known not only as a teller of strange, unforgettable tales and of what a Russian critic calls 'philosophical fables, which hypnotise both our senses and our mind,' but also as a poet who has discovered new islands of beauty. Russian literature possesses a truly remarkable translation of Poe's complete poetical works, which closely follows the metre of the original. This is perhaps the most adequate transposition of Poe's poetry yet produced in any language."

The translator thus referred to is Constantine Balmont,[2] the poet, who has also translated Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* into Russian. Whitman, says Balmont, is the South Pole. "But Edgar Poe is the North Pole and all the southern lands which one passes on one's way to the North Pole. Edgar Poe is the sweetest sound of the lute and the most passionate sob of the violin. He is sensation exalted to the state of crystal serenity, an enchanted gorgeous hall ending with a magical mirror.....Edgar Poe is the furnace of self-knowledge. He is our elder brother, the beloved Solitary One, and we sorely grieve that we are not able to sail up the river of years and join him, all of us, a faithful band, now so numerous, him, our king, who at that time was deserted, in the dreadful moment of his great struggle. Peace, peace be with him, our fair angel of sorrow. He lives among us, in our most delicate sensations, in the mad outcries of our sorrow, in the sonorous

[2]It will be remembered that Rachmaninoff's symphony, "The Bells," heard in New York and Philadelphia in February, 1920, was based on Balmont's translation of Poe's poem.

rhythms of our songs, in rhymes final and initial, in the beautiful gestures of the young girl who thinks of him."

"Poe is regarded in Germany," says Doctor Georg Edward,[3] himself a distinguished German poet and critic, "as the typical and characteristic American author." If the German attitude has been less devotional than that of France or Russia it has at least been more dissertational, the number of special studies that appeared in 1909 far surpassing those that appeared in any other country. Five years after Poe's death a leading German review declared that his name "was bound to live in the annals of American literature." Since then Poe's stories have been translated into all the German popular collections of world literature—Reclam, Hendel, Cotta, Spemann, Meyer, and others; and his poems have had an almost equal vogue. It was in 1860 that Friedrich Spielhagen, the German Balmont as Balmont was the Russian Baudelaire and Baudelaire the French Ingram, published in *Europa* a notable study of Poe whom he called "the greatest lyric singer that America has produced." There has been no diminution of German interest in Poe since 1860, and the German contention that Poe is representatively American rather than distinctively un-American seems to me one of the most valid contributions to Poe criticism yet made.

But German criticism errs, I think, in its insistence on the supposed debt that Poe owed to German literature and especially to Hoffmann. No indebtedness

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[3] See *The Book of the Poe Centenary*, University of Virginia, 1909, p. 74.

can be traced. Poe could not read German and, if he could, the native temper of his mind was such as to make him independent of Hoffmann and the Hoffmann school. Nor is there the analogy that the Germans assert between Poe, the writer, and Böcklin, the Swiss painter. Their ideals were different, their methods divergent, their results antipodal. Comparison between the two leads only to contrast.

An undesigned tribute to Poe's vogue in Germany may be mentioned in passing. It was my privilege to conduct a Poe Seminar at the University of Berlin during the winter of 1910-1911. "Whom do you consider the most famous woman born in America?" asked a German woman who was also a student of American history. After some hesitation I replied that in my judgment the choice would lie between Pocahontas and Dolly Madison. "But what would your answer be?" I asked. "Why," she replied, "I should have said Annabel Lee." Another unintentional tribute to Poe, to the haunting but elusive melody of one of his refrains, is found in Theodor Etzel's centennial translation of *The Raven*.[4] The translator was determined to preserve the long *o* sound which reappears four times in each stanza and culminates in the sonorous recurrence of "Nevermore." But "Nevermore" is not German and "Nimmermehr," which is German, is short, jerky, and unrelated to the coveted long *o* sound. The reader will hardly believe that the translator solves the difficulty by making the raven say "Nie du Thor," "Never, you fool," in answer to every question put to him by the disconsolate lover.

[4] See *Edgar Allan Poes Gedichte*, uebertragen von Theodor Etzel, München und Leipzig, 1909.

Is there in all the literature of translation a more dolorous example of the sacrifice of sense to sound, of mood to melody, of reason to rime, than these words furnish? But Poe would have enjoyed it, for it meant the triumph of his favorite vowel over obstacles that might well have daunted the master himself.[5]

Among the Latin countries, Italy seems to have been tardiest in translating Poe, though his influence had already pervaded Italy through the French translations of Baudelaire. "My guess is rather uncertain," writes Professor C. H. Grandgent, of Harvard, "as such guesses must be; but I should be inclined to rank Poe as third in Italy, preceded by Cooper and Longfellow." Professor Ernest H. Wilkins, of the University of Chicago, would substitute Whitman for Cooper: "It may fairly be said, I think, that Poe and Longfellow are the two American writers best known to Italian readers in general and that they are equally well known. In Italian critical opinion Poe and Whitman are regarded as being the two most important American writers and as being of equal importance." Felice Ferrero, the brother of the great historian, puts Poe first: "It is probably correct, in a certain sense, to say that Poe is more widely known in Italy than any other American writer; but I doubt whether one could say that he is a much read author. American literature is a *terra incognita* to the Italian reader. Knowledge of English is not sufficiently spread in

[5]Etzel's translation of *The Raven* is picked out for special commendation by Fritz Hippe in his *Edgar Allan Poes Lyrik in Deutschland* (1913). "He has succeeded," says Hippe, "as no one else has succeeded, in reproducing almost completely in German the refrain 'Nevermore' through the German 'Nie du Thor.'"

Italy to enable people of culture to enjoy the American authors in the original text, and very few translations had been published before the war. Most of the Italian acquaintance with American literature has been made indirectly through French translations. The popularity of Poe in France, therefore, explains why Poe is better known in Italy than other American writers. My first reading of Poe's *Contes extraordinaires* was in a French translation, there being at that time no Italian translation at all."

But Poe did not lack for translators after the start was once made. An Italian version of his stories, *Storie incredibili di Edgardo Poe,* appeared in 1869, another in 1876, and two in 1885. The *Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* followed in 1887. *The Raven* was translated into Italian verse in 1890 by Guido Menasci, and in 1892 Ulysse Ortensi, heeding the desire rather than the warning of Baudelaire, translated all of Poe's major poems into musical Italian prose.[6]

Italian art has also felt the impress of Poe's genius. It is well known that Gaetano Previati, whose influence has been potent on the modern school of Italian painters, found more inspiration for his brush in the

[6]Among the more important treatments of Poe by Italian scholars may be mentioned "I poeti americani," by Enrico Nencioni (*Nuova Antologia,* August 16, 1885); "L' estetica di Edgardo Poe," by P. Jannaccone (*Nuova Antologia,* July 15, 1895); "Il vero Edgardo Poe" with translations of many of the poems, by Raffaele Bresciano (Palermo-Roma, 1904); and an unsigned article on the Poe centenary that appeared in *Nuova Antologia* for February 1, 1909. "America and England," says the latter, "are celebrating the centenary of a writer whose fame is growing more and more, Edgar Allan Poe. The country of the great poet has already several times revised its opinion of this son who highly honors it, and each revision represents an approach to truth and justice."

writings of Poe than in the pages of any other genius, ancient or modern. Though Poe's works are, as we have seen, everywhere accessible in Italian, Previati prefers "the author's native language to the uncertainties that might arise in translation." In fact the purity and vividness of Poe's language are such that he is often used in foreign lands as the standard of classic English. "Are you familiar with the works of Edgar Allan Poe?" Doctor Inazo Nitobé, the famous Japanese scholar, was asked. "Familiar with them!" he replied. "We learn English in Japan from *The Raven* and *The Gold-Bug*."

It is by no means certain that Poe is better known in Spain than in Italy but the facts are more accessible. The distinguished Spanish novelist, Vicente Blasco Ibanez, when visiting the Poe Cottage at Fordham in November, 1919, said: "Poe is my spiritual and literary father. His name is as famous in Europe as Lincoln's." In Spain it is probably more famous. "Of all the American writers whose works have reached Spain," says John DeLancey Ferguson,[7] "Poe is probably the most significant. Though in mere number of translations he is surpassed by Cooper, he has received far more respectful treatment than has ever been accorded to the older man, and from the time of his first introduction to the present day the Spaniards have shown a persistent and steadily increasing interest in his work." It may be added that in Doctor Ferguson's appended bibliography of Spanish translations and critical articles Poe occupies as much space

[7]See Doctor Ferguson's *American Literature in Spain* (1916), New York.

as Cooper and Hawthorne combined and more than twice the number of pages filled by Longfellow.

The first Spanish edition of Poe's tales appeared in Madrid in 1858. The introduction is by Doctor Nicasio Landa who, amid much that is bizarre in biography and comment, declares rightly enough that Poe "was the first to exploit the marvelous in the field of science." There is as much difference, Doctor Landa holds, between Poe's tales and ordinary tales of witchcraft as there is between chemistry and alchemy—not a bad comparison. He also contests Baudelaire's statement that Poe's wretchedness was due to the crudeness of American democracy. No, says Doctor Landa, there "never was a country in which freedom of thought was permitted to carry itself to such extremes as in America," and he cites in triumphant illustration the unimpeded preachments of "Mistress Bloummer" and the popular vagaries of "the saints of last day."

Of Poe's command of English a later Spanish critic, D. A. H. Catà, writes as follows: "Never since Shakespeare has the English language been handled with such art. Poe had the secret of euphony and fine phrase; between his thoughts and his sentences there is always an indissoluble connection. He knew the inevitable word, the mitigating word, the consoling word. He knew what things make us laugh or weep and, master of inspiration and of language, he could always dominate our will, making our spirit run the whole gamut of emotion from grotesque merriment and vaguely sad placidity up to the brutal and agonizing horror of intolerable fear. He has made us yearn with his heroes, weep with their misfortunes,

and fear with their forebodings. His work will endure forever, because it is the child of beauty and of grief." Still more acute and illuminating is the remark of José de Castro y Serrano, the Spanish novelist. "Not long ago," he writes in 1871, "a great New-World genius (the Anglo-American Poe) astonished the present generation with his extraordinary tales (*Historias extraordinarias*). These were based on a philosophical principle, the sublimation, that is, of the marvelous, a principle which the human heart never has abandoned and never will abandon; and the skilful narrator was able to stir and to terrify the literary world despite the fact that Hoffmann had written many years before. The reason is that Hoffmann started from the fantastic in order to arrive naturally at the marvelous, while Poe starts in search of the marvelous from the threshold of the real and actual."

The Spanish centennial article is contributed by Ángel Guerra[8], who has been rated as "one of the four greatest living Spanish critics." He finds the same stubborn hostility to Poe in America that has existed from the beginning. In his native land "Poe has had to conquer a renown inch by inch which our old Europe would have sowed on all the winds of fame." He remains solitary, unrelated, un-American, not reached by influences from the writers of his own land or from those of England. "When they buried the remains of that unfortunate man, the Yankees thought they had buried in oblivion the talent of their greatest, their most original, their most profound poet,

[8]See "El centenario de Edgard Allan Poe" (*La Espana Moderna*, April, 1909).

not excluding Longfellow and Whitman. A huge silence enveloped the name of Edgar Poe in the United States.....But the glory of the final rehabilitation of the poet was reserved for a European, for Baudelaire, his spiritual brother. Edgar Poe's native land is America; his spiritual birth must be sought in Germany; his elevation to immortality, with justice rendered to his supreme merits, is the gift of generous France."

Whether Poe's popularity in Latin-American countries is a derivative of his popularity in Spain or harks back for its original impulse to Baudelaire's work, it would be hazardous to say. Certain it is, however, that no other American author has so fertilized the intellect and imagination of Central and South America as has Poe. This was the prompt testimony of Rubén Darío, Nicaragua's greatest poet, if not the greatest poet of Latin America, during his visit to the United States in the spring of 1915. Darío, by the way, prefixed a promising though fragmentary study to the volume of Poe's poems published in Madrid in 1909, the best translation in the volume being that of *The Raven* by the Venezuelan poet, Pérez Bonalde. "Poe is very well known in our Latin-American countries," writes from Buenos Aires the distinguished South American scholar, A. Abeledo, "*The Raven* and *The Bells* having passed into our school textbooks."

But, as Guerra has said, Poe's elevation to immortality is in a way "the gift of generous France," and it was the gift of France chiefly through Baudelaire and Mallarmé. "It would be too much to say," writes Henri Potez,[8] "that Edgar Poe begat Baudelaire and

[8]See "Edgar Poe et Jules Verne" (*La Revue*, Paris, May 15, 1909).

that Baudelaire begat almost all contemporary poetry; but the statement would contain much truth." When Remy de Gourmont was asked what external influences he deemed paramount in French literature, he replied: "Browning and Pater but, above all, Poe,—Poe, through his son, Mallarmé." No closer or more interesting literary affinity has ever existed than that between Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire. The chief difference was expressed by Baudelaire himself: "There is not in all of Poe's work a single passage that tends to lubricity or even to sensual pleasure." Barring this difference, which is fundamental, Baudelaire adopted all of Poe's critical *dicta* and defended them to the last with a loyalty that would brook not the slightest disagreement; he translated Poe's stories into French "with an identification of style and thought so exact," says Gautier, "that they seem original works rather than translations;" he lived to see Poe enthroned as one of the sovereigns of European literature; and, when nearing his own end, he made a solemn resolve "to pray to God every morning, to God who is the receptacle of all strength and all justice, to my father, to Marietta, and to Poe, as intercessors."

"It was in 1846 or 1847," Baudelaire wrote to Armand Fraisse, "that I became acquainted with a few fragments of Edgar Poe.[10] I experienced a peculiar emotion. As his complete works were not

[10]These fragments were probably, in part at least, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, translated by his intimate friend, Felix Tournachon, better known as "Nadar." Tournachon died in 1910 leaving unpublished memoirs. He was an interesting man. In the early fifties he broached the idea of a heavier-than-air flying machine, and in 1863 he carried his wife and friends in a balloon from Paris to Hanover.

collected till after his death, I had the patience to make friends with some Americans living in Paris so as to borrow from them collections of Journals that had been edited by Poe. And then I found—believe me or not, as you will—poems and tales of which I had already a vague, confused, and ill-ordered idea and which Poe had known how to arrange and bring to perfection." Six years later he writes: "I am accused of imitating Edgar Poe. Do you know why I translated Poe with such patience? *Because he was like me.* The first time that I opened a book of his, I saw with terror and delight not only subjects I had dreamed of, but *sentences* that I had thought of and that he had written twenty years before."

Baudelaire's first volume of translations from Poe, *Histoires extraordinaires,* appeared in 1856. Others followed till two years before his death in 1867. Many competitors have entered the lists against him but he has had no rivals. Baudelaire has, in fact, elevated and standardized the art of putting the prose of one language into the prose of another. One curious minor mistake may be mentioned. Jupiter, the negro in *The Gold-Bug,* says that his master was "as white as a gose [ghost]." Baudelaire makes him "as white as a goose," "pâle comme une oie." Also in *The Raven,* almost the only poem of Poe's that Baudelaire translated, "Though thy crest be shorn and shaven" is rendered, awkwardly, "Bien que ta tête soit sans huppe et sans cimier."

What Baudelaire did for Poe's prose, Stéphane Mallarmé and Gabriel Mourey did, though not with equal finality, for his verse.[11] In a letter written to

[11] Mourey's *Poésies complètes d'Edgar Poe,* 1889. re-

Sarah Helen Whitman on April 4, 1876, Mallarmé says: "Whatever is done to honor the memory of a genius the most truly divine the world has seen, ought it not at first to obtain your sanction? Such of Poe's works as our great Baudelaire has left untranslated, that is to say, the poems and many of the critical fragments, I hope to make known to France." Mallarmé was a symbolist and the prince of symbolists. His motto was, "To name is to destroy, to suggest is to create." He was spokesman for the subconscious. Every clear idea, he thought, had long ago been expressed; what remained was to give utterance to the subliminal. Edmund Gosse said of him: "Language was given to Mallarmé to conceal definite thought, to draw the eye away from the object. He aims at illusion and wraps mystery around his simplest utterance." Mallarmé's passion for perfection, in other words, brought its own defeat; it splintered his effort into fragments, shining fragments but fragments none the less. In his quest for symbolism the word rather than the idea became the unit.

These qualities of style are necessarily kept in check to a degree in Mallarmé's prose versions of Poe's poems; but, with all their perfection of word equivalence, these rimeless and rhythmless lines, these stanzas that lack the old integrations, seem almost a parody to

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mained the only complete translation of Poe's poems into French until the appearance in 1908 of Victor Orban's *Poésies complètes d'Edgar Poe*. Mourey's later edition of 1910 is prefaced by a letter from J. H. Ingram. It contains also the *Philosophy of Composition* as well as biographical and bibliographical notes.

Excellent translations of Poe's poems have also been made by Émile Lauvrière.

the reader whose ear has long been accustomed to the haunting melodies of the original. But that Mallarmé's translations are read and enjoyed in France is in itself a testimony to the innate beauty, the residual charm, of Poe's poetic structures, when bereft of those formal elements in which their beauty and charm have hitherto been thought so largely to consist. It is hard to think of *The Raven* or of *Ulalume* without those interreticulations of sound and form, those reciprocities of repetition and parallelism, which in Poe's hands fused them into artistic unity; but in Mallarmé's versions, however exquisite the prose, it is prose still. That Poe has stood the test is a noteworthy tribute to the intrinsic worth and fundamental texture of his poetic material. One unexpected result of Mallarmé's work has been to put Poe, in the eyes of Frenchmen at least, side by side with Whitman in the ranks of the *vers librists*. Strange bedfellows, these! "Yet it is true," says Caroline Ticknor,[12] "that Mallarmé's translations of Poe set the pace for the new school from which the exponents of *vers libre* assuredly derive their inspiration."

Of the many French biographies of Poe the most elaborate is that by Lauvrière.[13] But it is a study in pathology. Scholarly, painstaking, accurate, and even sympathetic in its statement of facts, its inferences do not carry conviction. *Morbidité, aliénisme, dégénérescence, décadence*—these do not belong to Poe. They can be read into his life and genius only by a studied selection of incidents and an equally studied

[12] *Poe's Helen* (1916), New York, p. 276.

[13] *Edgar Poe, sa vie et son oeuvre*, Paris, 1904. The book contains 732 pages.

rejection of those that do not fit. More of this in the next chapter but let it be said here that the French pendulum has already begun to swing in the opposite direction. The latest French life of Poe, that by André Fontainas,[14] takes issue squarely with Lauvrière and pleads eloquently and justly for a fairer and more comprehensive judgment of all the facts.

Whatever may be the verdict of the future on the nature of genius in general and of Poe's genius in particular—and we confidently believe that literature as pathology has had its day—no one can question Poe's primacy in France. "His verse," says Teodor de Wyzéwa, "is the most magnificent which the English language possesses." When George Brandes was asked more than twenty years ago to name the foreign writers who had done most to mould French literature, he mentioned first Edgar Allan Poe, adding as secondary influences Tolstoi, Dostoyevsky, Heine, and Shelley. Summing up his centennial survey of Poe's position in France, Curtis Hidden Page[15] writes: "Poe is the one American writer who has been accepted and acclaimed by the majority of intelligent Frenchmen." The last word is from André Fontainas,[16] poet, essayist, historian, biographer, and translator: "No writer of the English language has penetrated so profoundly the consciousness of the writers of all lands as has Edgar Allan Poe. In France he is as truly alive today as the most living of French poets."

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[14] *La vie d' Edgar A. Poe*, Paris, 1919. Of its 290 pages 27 are given over to a translation of the poems of Mrs. Whitman that were inspired by admiration for Poe.

[15] *The Evening Post*, N. Y., Jan. 16, 1909.

[16] *La vie d' Edgar A. Poe*, Paris, 1919, p. 247.

From England came the first biography of Poe characterized by fairness, by wide investigation, by unwearied collection of facts and manuscripts, and by an ardent though not intemperate admiration of the man and his work. From 1862 till his death in 1916 the central interest of John H. Ingram was the vindication of Poe's memory from the slanders of Griswold and the establishment of the poet's fame on the secure basis of an accurate and adequate text. Ingram has been called[17] "the discourager of Poe biographies." It is true that he soon came to regard Poe as preempted territory but only when some luckless biographer had assailed Ingram himself or given evidence of ineptitude in recording or interpreting the facts of Poe's life. Ingram was a tactless man as his correspondence with Mrs. Whitman shows; but with those whom he knew personally, with Swinburne, Morris, Rossetti, Mallarmé, and Mourey, Ingram was an enthusiastic crusader in a cause that he regarded as sacred. He had a right to say as he did say[18] a few years before his death: "I have labored for the glory of Poe and I have defended his reputation better than he himself would have done, for I knew better than he who were his friends and who his enemies. My effort has borne fruit, and the halo of glory about the poet has not ceased to grow brighter."

Ingram's first vindicatory *Memoir* appeared in 1874; but from Swinburne two years before had come the first clear note of authoritative lyric recognition of

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[17]See the article by Caroline Ticknor in *The Bookman*, N. Y., Sept., 1916.

[18]See his Lettre-Préface in Mourey's *Poésies complètes d' Edgar Poe* (1910).

Poe that had been heard from England. And, to the last, Swinburne was always ready to take up the cudgels for the American poet and to give a reason for his championship. "Once as yet, and once only," he wrote,[19] "has there sounded out of it all [American literature] one pure note of original song—worth singing, and echoed from the singing of no other man; a note of song neither wide nor deep, but utterly true, rich, clear, and native to the singer; the short, exquisite music, subtle and simple and somber and sweet, of Edgar Poe." According to Swinburne, the comparison of Poe with Hawthorne is the comparison of the complete with the half man of genius. "I was nearly tempted the other day," he declares,[20] "to write a rapid parallel or contrast between Hawthorne—the half man of genius who never could carry out an idea or work it through to the full result—and Poe, the complete man of genius (however flawed and clouded at times) who always worked out his ideas thoroughly, and made something solid, rounded, and durable of them—not a mist wreath or a waterfall."

In a later letter to Edmund Clarence Stedman, Swinburne refuses to put *Thanatopsis* or *The Commemoration Ode* in quite the same class with Poe's verse, and gives his reasons. "I believe you know my theory," he says, "that nothing which can possibly be as well said in prose ought ever to be said in verse." August meditation and grave patriotic feeling are good in their way, he contends, but it is not the way of song. "I must say that while I appreciate (I hope)

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[19] *Under the Microscope* (1872).

[20] See *The Letters of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, 2 vols., edited by Edmund Gosse and Thomas James Wise (1919).

the respective excellence of Mr. Bryant's *Thanatopsis* and of Mr. Lowell's *Commemoration Ode,* I can not say that either of them leaves in my ear the echo of a single note of song. It is excellent good speech, but if given us as song, its first and last duty is to sing. The one is most august meditation, the other a noble expression of deep and grave patriotic feeling on a supreme national occasion; but the thing more necessary, though it may be less noble than these, is the pulse, the fire, the passion of music—the quality of a singer, not of a solititary philosopher or a patriotic orator. Now, when Whitman is not speaking bad prose he sings, and when he sings at all he sings well. Mr. Longfellow has a pretty little pipe of his own, but surely it is very thin and reedy. Again, whatever may be Mr. Emerson's merits, to talk of his Poetry seems to me like talking of the scholarship of a child who has not learned its letters."

But the praise that would have meant most to the living Poe came from Tennyson. Poe's admiration for Tennyson knew no bounds, though he did not live to read the poems on which the laureate's fame is now seen to rest most securely. "I am not sure," he once wrote, "that Tennyson is not the greatest of poets.... By the enjoyment or non-enjoyment of the *Morte d' Arthur* or of the *Œnone* I would test any man's ideal sense." He loved to recite from *The Princess* the song beginning,

> Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,

and used to say that the words,

> When unto dying eyes
> The casement slowly grows a glimmering square,

were "unsurpassed by any image expressed in writing." But when Tennyson was asked in 1875 to write an epitaph of one line for Poe's monument in Westminster Churchyard, Baltimore, he said to his son: "How can so strange and so fine a genius, and so sad a life, be exprest and comprest in one line?" He wrote, however, to the committee: "I have long been acquainted with Poe's works, and am an admirer of them." But when later he came to pass a more matured judgment on Poe as poet and prose-writer, he said:[21] "I know several striking poems by American poets, but I think that Edgar Poe is (taking his poetry and prose together) the most original American genius."

Tennyson's opinion is shared by the representative English critics. "Poe is the greatest writer in prose fiction whom America has produced," wrote Andrew Lang.[22] "He has left a body of widely various criticism which, as such, will better stand critical examination today," writes J. M. Robertson,[23] "than any similar work produced in England or America in his time." And Edmund Gosse[24] in his centennial article says of Poe, the poet: "He was the pioneer of a school which has spread its influence to the confines of the civilised world, and is now revolutionising literature."

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[21] *Alfred Lord Tennyson*, a Memoir by his son, vol. II, pp. 292-293 (1897). This was said in 1883.

[22] In his edition of *The Poems of Poe* (1881).

[23] Robertson's essay on *Poe*, first published in *Our Corner*, London, 1885, and republished in *New Essays Towards a Critical Method*, London and New York, 1897, seems to me on the whole the ablest brief treatment of Poe (fifty-four pages) yet published in any language. It has been reproduced in *Specimens of Modern English Literary Criticism*, edited by William T. Brewster, New York, 1907.

[24] *Contemporary Review*, February, 1909.

III

This survey of Poe as an international influence is not meant to anticipate your own opinion or to coerce your own judgment, but to free it. It is meant to furnish perspective and background for the study of a writer who in American criticism has been traditionally represented not as a world-author but as narrow and even sectional in his appeal. It is an attempt to let 1849 hear the voices of 1909.

It was an evil day for American literary criticism, for what we call Americanism in the larger sense, when the great Emerson curtly dismissed Poe as "the jingle man." He was biting on granite, as was Poe when he dubbed Emerson a "mystic for mysticism's sake." Both would have retracted gladly could they have re-weighed their verdicts in the scales of the impartial years. Jingles can not be translated into potent and radiating inspirations in other tongues; and the mystic for mysticism's sake can not enrich the ethical standards of a reading world.

When we hear that Henry James pronounced Poe's poems "very valueless verse," it is surely worth while to know that the world at large does not think so; when John Burroughs calls Poe's verse "empty of thought," it is worth asking if the defect may not lie in the critic rather than in the poet; when Brownell asserts that Poe's writings, whether prose or verse, "lack the elements not only of great but of real literature," when he pleads that Poe should be denied a place in the American Hall of Fame, it is well to hear the multitudinous laughter of a world that has already enthroned him in its own more exclusive Hall of Fame.

Poe has been studied as an effect, the effect of unfortunate inheritance, of cramping poverty, of uncongenial environment. But let us study him as a cause. A voice is studied backward from its reach and resonance. A projectile force is studied not merely in its constituents but by its power to project. "By their fruits ye shall know them," not by their roots. Doctor Samuel Johnson once said that he never knew that he had succeeded "until he felt the rebound." We have tried to estimate, though very cursorily, the rebound of Poe's effort. Ben Jonson phrased it better still: "Men, and almost all sorts of creatures, have their reputation by distance; rivers, the farther they run and the more from their spring, the broader they are, and the greater." Poe has traveled far from his spring. Are we wrong in approaching the study of him with at least the provisional supposition that there is a certain breadth, even a certain greatness in him?

CHAPTER II

The Man

I

If, to know Poe, we must know him as a world-author, it is equally necessary that we know him as a man. His world-fame is, after all, but the reach of his genius; it is not its source or matrix. These are to be sought in the man himself, in his reaction to the life about him, in the temper and quality of his thought about things unliterary as well as literary. In a word, Poe's personality is not only essential in the interpretation of his work; it is, unfortunately, that part of the man that has been consistently ignored or as consistently misrepresented. The common view of Poe is that he had no personality. He had temperament; he had genius; he had individuality. But that richer combination that we call personality, that coordination of thought and mood and conduct, of social action and reaction, of daily interest and aim, this finds no portrayal in the biographies of Poe. Instead, we are told that Poe alone among American writers was utterly unrelated to time and place; that he saw only through a telescope; that for him the contemporary did not exist; that, like the lady of Shalott, peering into a mirror with her back to the realities of life, Poe was a dreamer and nothing but a dreamer.

Let us try to break away from the stereotyped biographies of Poe. They confuse the exceptional with the characteristic in his life, and they exalt particular

moments and moods into fixed crystallizations of habit or impulse. Gestures are regarded as attitudes, and a single incident is made the scales in which an entire life is weighed. Let us take Poe's great phrase, "totality of effect," and look at his life as a whole.

So far from being unrelated to the problems and interests of his time, Poe seems to me the one man in American literature from whose writings a history of the essential thought-currents of the time could be garnered. But by his writings I do not mean primarily his poems or his stories; in these he deliberately turned away from the things of every-day life or so subtly transfused them as to make the distillation not easily identifiable as concrete incident or personal experience. I mean, above all, the criticisms that he passed on the men and women and things and themes that made up the life round about him. In the only complete edition of his works, the Virginia Edition,[1] containing seventeen volumes, only one volume contains Poe's poetry, five volumes his stories, while nine volumes contain his criticisms, his essays, his miscellanies, his marginalia, and his letters. In these nine volumes lie scattered the elements which combined will summon back to us Poe, the man, as he can not be recalled from the volumes that reveal him as the self-conscious and creative artist.

II

All the information that we have about Poe goes to show that he observed closely and accurately. Mere dreamers do not. If he saw through a telescope it was

[1] By James A. Harrison, New York, 1902.

only that he might extend the knowledge already gained through a microscope. Lowell said of him:

"He combines in a very remarkable manner two faculties which are seldom found united; a power of influencing the mind of the reader by the impalpable shadows of mystery, and a minuteness of detail which does not leave a pin or a button unnoticed."

But Lowell was speaking of Poe, the artist; he did not know that Poe, the man, was as minutely observant and retentive as Poe, the weaver of narrative spells. In a letter to Mrs. M. L. Shew, who had asked him to make some art purchases for her, Poe writes:

"During my first call at your house after my Virginia's death, I noticed with so much pleasure the large painting over the piano, which is a masterpiece indeed; and I noticed the size of all your paintings, the scrolls instead of set figures of the drawing-room carpet, the soft effect of the window shades, also the crimson and gold..... I was charmed to see the harp and piano uncovered. The pictures of Raphael and the 'The Cavalier' I shall never forget their softness and beauty! The guitar with the blue ribbon, music-stand and antique jars!"

There are two room interiors that always recur to me as I try to make clear in my own mind the difference between Poe, the artist, and Poe, the man. It must be remembered that Poe's philosophy of art impelled him to beauty *plus* strangeness. This element of the strange, the eerie, the arrestive-because-not-seen-before, is present in all of his art creations. It is

not accidental; it is a part of a studied and predetermined effect. Bacon had said, "There is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion," and Poe quotes and re-quotes the saying both as defense and as goal of his own practise. The reader is justified in saying of Poe's studied descriptions and of his fictive characters that they are not accurate transcripts from real life, but he is not justified in saying that Poe was not an accurate observer. Sensitiveness to the abnormal presupposes an even greater sensitiveness to the normal. Everything that is strange to us in Poe's creations was strange first to him. There is never for a moment in his work any suggestion of inability to distinguish between the normal and the abnormal, between the natural and the bizarre. "Poe was not a victim of delusions," says Curtis Hidden Page, "but a creature of illusions." He loved mystery and mystification but he was not a mystic.

Note now the studied strangeness that haunts the interior of Roderick Usher's room in *The Fall of the House Usher*:

"The room in which I found myself was very large and lofty. The windows were long, narrow, and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within. Feeble gleams of encrimsoned light made their way through the trellised panes, and served to render sufficiently distinct the more prominent objects around; the eye, however, struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the chamber, or the recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling. Dark draperies hung upon the walls. The general furniture was profuse,

comfortless, antique, and tattered. Many books and musical instruments lay scattered about, but failed to give any vitality to the scene. I felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow. An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all."

If Poe, the conscious artist, speaks in Usher's room, surely Poe, the man, the observer, the lover of beauty without strangeness, speaks in the description of the parlor of *Landor's Cottage*:

"Nothing could be more rigorously simple than the furniture of the parlour. On the floor was an ingrain carpet, of excellent texture—a white ground, spotted with small circular green figures. At the windows were curtains of snowy white jaconet muslin; they were tolerably full, and hung *decisively*, perhaps rather formally, in sharp parallel plaits to the floor. The walls were papered with a French paper of great delicacy—a silver ground, with a faint green cord running zigzag throughout. Its expanse was relieved merely by three of Julien's exquisite lithographs *à trois crayons*, fastened to the wall without frames. One of these drawings was a scene of Oriental luxury, or rather voluptuousness; another was a 'carnival piece' spirited beyond compare; the third was a Greek female head; a face so divinely beautiful, and yet of an expression so provokingly indeterminate, never before arrested my attention.

"The more substantial furniture consisted of a round table, a few chairs (including a large rocking-chair) and a sofa, or rather 'settee'; its material was plain maple painted a creamy white, slightly inter-

striped with green—the seat of cane. The chairs and table were 'to match'; but the forms of all had evidently been designed by the same brain which planned 'the grounds'; it is impossible to imagine anything more graceful.

"On the table were a few books; a large, square crystal bottle of some novel perfume; a plain, ground-glass astral (not solar) lamp, with an Italian shade; and a large vase of resplendently-blooming flowers. Flowers indeed, of gorgeous colours and delicate odour, formed the sole mere *decoration* of the apartment. The fireplace was nearly filled with a vase of brilliant geranium. On a triangular shelf in each angle of the room stood also a similar vase, varied only as to its lovely contents. One or two smaller bouquets adorned the mantel; and late violets clustered about the opened windows."

The same contrast is seen between the characters that drift or shimmer through Poe's poems and stories and those photographic portraits that he has left us of the men and women that he had actually met. These show a clearness of instant vision, an ability to see the object as in itself it really is, that critics have denied to the creator of Ligeia, Morella, Annabel Lee, Usher, and others. But in the latter Poe's purpose was to make an artistic use of indefinitiveness, "a suggestive indefinitiveness," as he said of *The Lady of Shalott*, "with a view of bringing about a definitiveness of vague and therefore of spiritual *effect*." Turn now to *The Literati of New York* and note the clear-cut pen-pictures that Poe made of the writers that he had seen and met. William Cullen Bryant he had not

met but he had passed him on the street and had heard him speak. Is there anywhere such a picture of Bryant as Poe has drawn in this sketch?

"He is now fifty-two years of age. In height, he is perhaps five feet nine. His frame is rather robust. His features are large but thin. His countenance is sallow, nearly bloodless. His eyes are piercing gray, deep set, with large projecting eyebrows. His mouth is wide and massive, the expression of the smile hard, cold—even sardonic. The forehead is broad, with prominent organs of ideality; a good deal bald; the hair thin and grayish, as are also the whiskers, which he wears in a simple style. His bearing is quite distinguished, full of the aristocracy of intellect. In general, he looks in better health than before his last visit to England. He seems active—physically and morally energetic. His dress is plain to the extreme of simplicity, although of late there is a certain degree of Anglicism about it.

"In character no man stands more loftily than Bryant. The peculiarly melancholy expression of his countenance has caused him to be accused of harshness, or coldness of heart. Never was there a greater mistake. His soul is charity itself, in all respects generous and noble. His manners are undoubtedly reserved."

In the letter that Poe wrote to Mrs. Clemm as soon as he and Virginia had arrived in New York from Philadelphia there is a solicitous affection that can not be paraphrased. There is a pathos, too, beyond the reach of conscious art. But is there not also a mi-

nuteness of detail, an eager, loving, childlike recording of little things that nothing seems to escape? The author of *The Raven* and *Ulalume* and *The Sleeper* may have been a dreamer but it was not a dreamer that penned these lines:

"New York, Sunday Morning,
"April 7, [1844], just after breakfast.

"MY DEAR MUDDY—We have just this minute done breakfast, and I now sit down to write you about everything. I can't pay for the letter, because the P. O. won't be open to-day. In the first place we arrived safe at Walnut St. wharf. The driver wanted to make me pay a dollar, but I wouldn't. Then I had to pay a boy a levy to put the trunks in the baggage car. In the meantime I took Sis [Virginia] in the Depot Hotel. It was only a quarter past six, and we had to wait till seven. We saw the 'Ledger' and 'Times'—nothing in either—a few words of no account in the 'Chronicle.' We started in good spirits, but did not get here until nearly three o'clock. We went in the cars to Amboy, about forty miles from N. York, and then took the steamboat the rest of the way. Sissy coughed none at all. When we got to the wharf it was raining hard. I left her on board the boat, after putting the trunks in the Ladies' cabin, and set off to buy an umbrella and look for a boarding-house. I met a man selling umbrellas, and bought one for twenty-five cents.

"Then I went up Greenwich St. and soon found a boarding-house. It was just before you get to Cedar St., on the west side going up—left-hand side. It has brown stone steps, with a porch with brown pillars.

'Morrison' is the name on the door. I made a bargain in a few minutes and then got a hack and went for Sis. I was not gone more than half an hour, and she was quite astonished to see me back so soon. She didn't expect me for an hour. There were two other ladies waiting on board—so she wasn't very lonely. When we got to the house we had to wait about half an hour before the room was ready. The house is old and looks buggy [The letter is cut here for the signature on the other side.] the cheapest board I ever knew, taking into consideration the central situation and the *living*. I wish Kate [Catterina, the cat] could see it—she would faint. Last night, for supper, we had the nicest tea you ever drank, strong and hot, wheat bread, rye bread—cheese—tea-cakes (elegant), a great dish (two dishes) of elegant ham and two of cold veal, piled up like a mountain and large slices—three dishes of the cakes and everything in the greatest profusion. No fear of starving here. The landlady seemed as if she couldn't press us enough, and we were at home directly. Her husband is living with her—a fat, good-natured old soul. There are eight or ten boarders—two or three of them ladies—two servants. For breakfast we had excellent-flavored coffee, hot and strong—not very clear and no great deal of cream—veal cutlets, elegant ham and eggs and nice bread and butter. I never sat down to a more plentiful or a nicer breakfast. I wish you could have seen the eggs—and the great dishes of meat. I ate the first hearty breakfast I have eaten since I left our little home. Sis is delighted, and we are both in excellent spirits. She has coughed hardly any and had no night sweat. She is now busy mending my pants which I tore against a nail.

"I went out last night and bought a skein of silk, a skein of thread, two buttons, a pair of slippers, and a tin pan for the stove. The fire kept in all night. We have now got four dollars and a half left. To-morrow I am going to try and borrow three dollars, so that I may have a fortnight to go upon. I feel in excellent spirits, and haven't drank a drop—so that I hope soon to get out of trouble. The very instant I scrape together enough money I will sent it on. You can't imagine how much we both do miss you. Sissy had a hearty cry last night, because you and Catterina weren't here. We are resolved to get two rooms the first moment we can. In the meantime it is impossible we could be more comfortable or more at home than we are. It looks as if it were going to clear up now. Be sure and go to the P. O. and have my letters forwarded. As soon as I write Lowell's article, I will send it to you, and get you to get the money from Graham. Give our best love to C."

But Poe the man is seen not merely in the unclouded clearness with which he saw and reproduced the men and things of his time but more especially in his reaction to the ideas and institutions that environed him. So far from holding himself apart and aloof, he fronted the old and the new of his day with an eager philosophic interest that would have kept his name afloat, if not alive, even though he had written no work of creative genius. "Poe had no sweep of intellectual outlook," says Brander Matthews, "no interest in the world of ideas, as he had no interest in the world of affairs." A verdict of this sort can be accounted for only on the supposition that its author

had not read that part of Poe's writing which, if not destined for immortality, is peculiarly freighted with autobiography.

One of the larger questions that pressed for solution in Poe's lifetime was that of public education in the South. Poe had himself applied for a position as teacher in a public school of Baltimore early in 1835. "In my present circumstances," he writes to his friend, J. P. Kennedy, "such a position would be most desirable, and if your interest could obtain it for me, I would always remember your kindness with the deepest gratitude." He was unsuccessful in his application but, what is far more important, he became a resolute champion of a public school system for every southern state, a system that should have as its pinnacle a state university. This was Jefferson's plan, though many years were to pass before it was to find even partial fulfillment. Poe had hardly moved to Richmond before we find him urging upon Virginians "the establishment throughout the country of district schools upon a plan of organization similar to that of our New England friends." He does not believe, as William Wirt believed, that as need arises rich men will establish universities without the aid of state governments, and he points proudly to Virginia, "where, notwithstanding the extent of private opulence and the disadvantages under which the community so long labored from a want of regular and systematic instruction, it was the government which was finally compelled, and not private societies which were induced, to provide establishments for effecting the great end."

At times Poe suggests new subjects for the school

curriculum. After proving, by his own amazing powers of analysis, that "human ingenuity cannot concoct a cipher which human ingenuity cannot resolve," he adds:

"It may be observed, generally, that in such investigations the analytic ability is very forcibly called into action; and, for this reason, cryptographical solutions might with great propriety be introduced into academies as the means of giving tone to the most important of the powers of the mind."

The time may come, he thinks, when the student will be taught to read not by words or paragraphs but by pages:

"A deep-rooted and strictly continuous habit of reading will, with certain classes of intellect, result in an instinctive and seemingly magnetic appreciation of a thing written; and now the student reads by pages just as other men by words. Long years to come, with a careful analysis of the mental process, may even render this species of appreciation a common thing. It may be taught in the schools of our descendants of the tenth or twentieth generation."

Poe's own habit of reading page by page was that of Theodore Roosevelt. "The child," says Lawrence F. Abbott,[2] "reads laboriously syllable by syllable or word by word; the practised adult reads line by line; Roosevelt read almost page by page and yet remembered what he read."

[2] *Impressions of Theodore Roosevelt* (1919), p. 183.

Another problem, more menacing and insistent than that of education, was the problem of slavery. Poe was reared in a slave-holding community; he was one of the first American writers to introduce a slave and his dialect into a short story; and his thought on the great issue itself is characteristically matured and original. In 1836 he writes:

"There is a view of the subject most deeply interesting to us, which we do not think has ever been presented by any writer in as high relief as it deserves. We speak of the moral influences flowing from the relation of master and slave, and the moral feelings engendered and cultivated by it.... We shall take leave to speak, as of things *in esse,* of a degree of loyal devotion on the part of the slave to which the white man's heart is a stranger, and of the master's reciprocal feeling of parental attachment to his humble dependent, equally incomprehensible to him who drives a bargain with the cook who prepares his food, the servant who waits at his table, and the nurse who dozes over his sick bed. That these sentiments in the breast of the negro and his master are stronger than they would be under like circumstances between individuals of the white race, we believe. That they belong to the class of feelings 'by which the heart is made better,' we know. How come they? They have their rise in the relation between the infant and the nurse. They are cultivated between him and his foster brother. They are cherished by the parents of both. They are fostered by the habit of affording protection and favors to the younger offspring of the same nurse. They grow by the habitual use of the

word 'my,' used in the language of affectionate appropriation, long before any idea of value mixes with it. It is a term of endearment. That is an easy transition by which he who is taught to call the little negro 'his,' in this sense and *because he loves him,* shall love him *because he is his.* The idea is not new, that our habits and affections are reciprocally cause and effect of each other.

"But the great teacher in this school of feeling is sickness. In this school we have witnessed scenes at which even the hard heart of a thorough bred philanthropist would melt. But here, we shall be told, it is not humanity, but interest that prompts. Be it so. Our business is not with the cause but the effect. But is it interest, which, with assiduous care, prolongs the life of the aged and decrepid negro, who has been, for years, a burthen? Is it interest which labors to rear the crippled or deformed urchin, who can never be anything but a burthen—which carefully feeds the feeble lamp of life that, without any appearance of neglect, might be permitted to expire? Is not the feeling more akin to that parental στοργή which, in defiance of reason, is most careful of the life which is, all the time, felt to be a curse to the possessor? Are such cases rare? They are as rare as the occasions; but let the occasion occur, and you will see the case. How else is the longevity of the negro proverbial? A negro who does no work for thirty years! (and we know such examples) is it interest which has lengthened out his existence?"

The argument does credit to Poe's heart, if not to his head; and the instances that he later adduces, in-

stances that he had himself witnessed, of love and devotion at the sick bed of master and slave, evince a native sympathy and susceptibility of which Poe's stories give only scattered hints. Though abolition had made but little headway at this time, Poe seemed to have an intuitive conviction that slavery was doomed. "It is a sort of boding," he says, "that may belong to the family of superstitions. All vague and undefined fears, from causes the nature of which we know not, the operations of which we cannot stay, are of that character."

Partly because of his defense of slavery and partly because of his views on southern literature, the charge has often been made that Poe was partisan and sectional. But he was neither. His loyalty to certain definite principles of criticism is evident in all that he wrote. It was not men or parties or sections of the country that Poe defended; it was rather those bases of thought and feeling which had come to have for him the authority of ultimate truth. If a southerner violates these principles Poe's blade pierces his armor as surely as though he were a New England transcendentalist or incorrigible abolitionist. Take the case of William Gilmore Simms, the novelist and poet, of South Carolina. Poe is constantly complaining that Simms and other writers not born in New England are omitted in popular compendiums of American literature, but he is unsparing in pointing out the defects of Simms as a writer, defects which no one questions to-day. Poe's contention is not that southern writers are better than others but that they at least deserve consideration in every survey of American literature that claims to be representative. Totality rather than

personality is the real issue. If New England writers are omitted from such surveys or inadequately represented, Poe is prompt to note the defect. When Griswold published his famous *Poets and Poetry of America,* in 1842, Poe wrote of it: "Perhaps the author, without being aware of it himself, has unduly favored the writers of New England," but he adds that injustice has also been done to two New Englanders, Lowell and Holmes: "A few years hence Mr. Griswold himself will be amazed that he assigned no more space to Lowell than to McLellan, Tuckerman, and others." It is in prophecies of this sort, by the way, that Poe's critical sagacity is seen at its best. Lowell had written hardly anything when this forecast was made but in that little Poe had detected unerringly the coming poet.

Of Griswold's *Female Poets of America,* Poe writes:

"We are glad, for Mr. Griswold's sake, as well as for the interests of our literature generally, to perceive that he has been at the pains of doing what Northern critics seem to be at great pains *never* to do—that is to say, he has been at the trouble of doing justice, in great measure, to several poetesses who have not had the good fortune to be born in the North. The notices of the Misses Cary, of the Misses Fuller, of the sisters Mrs. Warfield and Mrs. Lee, of Mrs. Nichols, of Mrs. Welby, and of Miss Susan Archer Talley, reflect credit upon Mr. Griswold, and show him to be a man not more of taste than—shall we say it?—of courage. Let our readers be assured that, (as matters are managed among the four or five different *cliques*

who control our whole literature in controlling the larger portion of our critical journals,) it requires no small amount of *courage,* in an author whose subsistence lies in his pen, to *hint,* even, that anything good, in a literary way, can, by any possibility, exist out of the limits of a certain narrow territory."

Everything that Poe said about southern literature and western literature was said not with the view of unduly exalting either but of giving to both a place of impartial representation beside the literature of New England. When Whitman a generation later pleaded for a literature that should be commensurate with American life, he was only transmitting the torch lighted by Poe.

But the charge of intemperate sectionalism is brought most frequently against Poe's criticism of Lowell's *Fable for Critics.* "Mr. Lowell," he writes, "is one of the most rabid of the Abolition fanatics; and no southerner who does not wish to be insulted, and at the same time revolted by a bigotry the most obstinately blind and deaf, should ever touch a volume by this author." One may well ask, What has this to do with Lowell, the poet, or Lowell, the literary critic? Nothing whatever. But Lowell had called his Fable only "a slight *jeu d'esprit*" and yet had introduced into it such lines as,

> Forty fathers of Freedom, of whom twenty bred
> Their sons for the rice swamps at so much a head,
> And their daughters for.....faugh!

Surely one can not blame Poe for abdicating the rôle of literary critic for a moment and warning the readers of the *Southern Literary Messenger* of what they

may expect in a poem which presumably was to deal only with matters literary. He is not striking beneath the belt: he is warding off a blow already aimed beneath the belt. But the omission of the anti-southern lines from the college editions of Lowell's poem makes Poe's reference seem an irrelevant and unwarranted intrusion of sectionalism. Is it not unfair and un-American to cite Poe's outburst of indignation without citing at the same time the lines that called it into being? Poe's review of the *Fable for Critics,* read as a whole, does credit to his impartiality and to his desire to see North, South, East, and West justly represented in a national American literature. He begins with a discussion of the reasons for the absence of satire in our literature:

"It seems to us that, in America, we have refused to encourage satire—not because what we have had touches us too nearly—but because it has been too pointless to touch us at all. Its namby-pambyism has arisen, in part, from the general want, among our men of letters, of that minute *polish*—of that skill in details—which, in combination with natural sarcastic power, satire, more than any other form of literature, so imperatively demands. In part, also, we may attribute our failure to the colonial sin of imitation. We content ourselves—at this point not less supinely than at all others—with doing what not only has been done before, but what, however well done, has yet been done *ad nauseam.* We should not be able to endure infinite repetitions of even absolute excellence; but what is 'McFingal' more than a faint echo from 'Hudibras'?—and what is 'The Vision of Rubeta'

more than a vast gilded swill-trough overflowing with Dunciad and water? Although we are not all Archilochuses, however—although we have few pretensions to the ἠκήεντες ἴαμβοι—although, in short, we are no satirists ourselves—there can be no question that we answer sufficiently well as subjects for satire."

When Poe comes to the lines about himself,

> Here comes Poe with his Raven, like Barnaby Rudge—
> Three-fifths of him genius, and two-fifths sheer fudge;
> Who talks like a book of iambs and pentameters,
> In a way to make all men of common sense d....n metres;
> Who has written some things far the best of their kind;
> But somehow the heart seems squeezed out by the mind,

his objection is not to Lowell's fractional distribution of "genius" and "fudge" but to the omission of all other southerners save himself:

"It is a fashion among Mr. Lowell's set to affect a belief that there is *no such thing* as Southern Literature. Northerners—people who have really nothing to speak of as men of letters,—are cited by the dozen, and lauded by this candid critic without stint, while Legaré, Simms, Longstreet, and others of equal note are passed by in contemptuous silence. Mr. L. cannot carry his frail honesty of opinion even so far south as New York. All whom he praises are Bostonians. Other writers are barbarians, and satirized accordingly—if mentioned at all."

Yet in this same review, one of the last that Poe wrote, he defends Longfellow and Lowell against the attack of Margaret Fuller:

"Messrs. Longfellow and Lowell, so pointedly picked out for abuse [by Miss Fuller] as the *worst* of our poets, are, upon the whole, perhaps, our best—although Bryant and one or two others are scarcely inferior."[3]

The more Poe's Americanism is studied the less restricted it will be seen to be. "You are almost the only fearless American critic," Lowell wrote him in 1842, and, when inviting him to address the Boston Lyceum, he added: "The Boston people want a little independent criticism vastly." Poe was not only fearless and independent; he was untrammeled by local prejudice and he was singularly future-minded. Our cause, he says, is "the cause of a national as distinguished from a sectional literature." He saw clearly that America would not always be hemmed within its present boundaries, and he looked to the Pacific as the arena of our future exploits and to "a hardy, effective, and well disciplined national navy" as "the main prop of our national power." Commenting on the "Report of the Committee on Naval Affairs," of March 21, 1836, he writes:

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[3]Stedman's reference to the clash between Poe and Lowell is amusing: "A speck of reservation spoiled for him [Poe] the fullest cup of esteem, even when tendered by the most knightly and authoritative hands. Lowell's *Fable for Critics*, declaring 'three-fifths of him genius,' gave him an award which ought to content even an unreasonable man. As it was, the good-natured thrusts of one whose scholarship was unassailable, at his metrical and other hobbies, drew from him a somewhat coarse and vindictive review of the whole satire." Poe, it must be remembered, did not happen to belong to the "Sweet Alice" type, so affectingly portrayed by Thomas Dunn English:

"She wept with delight when you gave her a smile,
And trembled with grief at your frown."

"Our pride as a vigorous commercial empire should stimulate us to become our own pioneers in that vast island-studded ocean, destined, it may be, to become, not only the chief theatre of our traffic, but the arena of our future naval conflicts. Who can say, viewing the present rapid growth of our population, that the Rocky Mountains shall forever constitute the western boundary of our republic, or that it shall not stretch its dominion from sea to sea? This may not be desirable, but signs of the times render it an event by no means without the pale of possibility."

Realizing that America had followed in the rear of scientific discovery when she ought to have led the van, he pleads eloquently for national aid to scientific research:

"It is our *duty*, holding as we do a high rank in the scale of nations, to contribute a large share to that aggregate of useful knowledge, which is the common property of all. We have astronomers, mathematicians, geologists, botanists, eminent professors in every branch of physical science—we are unincumbered by the oppression of a national debt, and are free from many other drawbacks which fetter and control the measures of the trans-Atlantic governments. We possess, as a people, the mental elasticity which liberal institutions inspire, and a treasury which can afford to remunerate scientific research. Ought we not, therefore, to be foremost in the race of philanthropic discovery, in every department embraced by this comprehensive term? Our national honor and glory which, be it remembered, are to be 'transmitted

as well as enjoyed,' are involved. In building up the fabric of our commercial prosperity, let us not filch the corner-stone. Let it not be said of us, in future ages, that we ingloriously availed ourselves of a stock of scientific knowledge, to which we had not contributed our quota—that we shunned as a people to put our shoulder to the wheel—that we reaped where we had never sown. It is not to be controverted that such has been hitherto the case. We have followed in the rear of discovery, when a sense of our moral and political responsibility should have impelled us in its van."

But his strictures on America and Americans were equally bold and outspoken. When James Fenimore Cooper was being attacked with a malignity and scurrility without parallel in our history merely because he had made some tactless but essentially sound comments on American democracy, Poe, almost alone among American critics, hurried to the aid of the elder novelist. "We are a bull-headed and prejudiced people, and it were well if we had a few more of the stamp of Mr. Cooper who would feel themselves at liberty to tell us so to our teeth." The American fondness for glitter, glare, and show found in Poe its most consistent contemporary satirist:

"We have no aristocracy of blood, and having therefore as a natural, and indeed as an inevitable thing, fashioned for ourselves an aristocracy of dollars, the display of *wealth* has here to take the place and perform the office of the heraldic display in monarchical countries. By a transition readily understood, and

which might have been as readily foreseen, we have been brought to merge in simple *show* our notions of taste itself."

While his Americanism resented "the disgusting spectacle of our subserviency to British criticism," it resented equally the inverted patriotism that commends a bad book because an American wrote it:

"There was a time, it is true, when we cringed to foreign opinion—let us even say when we paid a most servile deference to British critical dicta. That an American book could, by any possibility, be worthy perusal, was an idea by no means extensively prevalent in the land; and if we were induced to read at all the productions of our native writers, it was only after repeated assurances from England that such productions were not altogether contemptible..... The *excess* of our subserviency was blamable—but, as we have before said, this very excess might have found a shadow of excuse in the strict justice, if properly regulated, of the principle from which it issued. Not so, however, with our present follies. We are becoming boisterous and arrogant in the pride of a too speedily assumed literary freedom. We throw off, with the most presumptuous and unmeaning hauteur, *all* deference whatever to foreign opinion—we forget, in the puerile inflation of vanity, that *the world* is the true theatre of the biblical histrio—we get up a hue and cry about the necessity of encouraging native writers of merit—we blindly fancy that we can accomplish this by indiscriminate puffing of good, bad, and indifferent, without taking the trouble to consider that

what we choose to denominate encouragement is thus, by its general application, rendered precisely the reverse. In a word, so far from being ashamed of the many disgraceful literary failures to which our own inordinate vanities and misapplied patriotism have lately given birth, and so far from deeply lamenting that these daily puerilities are of home manufacture, we adhere pertinaciously to our original blindly conceived idea, and thus often find ourselves involved in the gross paradox of liking a stupid book the better, because, sure enough, its stupidity is American."

But subserviency to mere rank, to inherited wealth or social position, was an outrage to Poe's Americanism more deeply resented than subserviency to foreign criticism. Deploring the popularity of Charles O'Malley's *Irish Dragoon,* Poe pays his respects to the base sycophancy of the book in words that still flame and warn:

"There is a disgusting vulgarism of thought which pervades and contaminates this whole production, and from which a delicate or lofty mind will shrink as from a pestilence. Not the least repulsive manifestation of this leprosy is to be found in the author's blind and grovelling worship of mere rank. Of the Prince Regent, that filthy compound of all that is bestial—that lazarhouse of all moral corruption—he scruples not to speak in terms of the grossest adulation—sneering at Edmund Burke in the same villainous breath in which he extols the talents, the graces, and the *virtues* of George the Fourth! That any man, to-day, can be found so degraded in heart as to style this reprobate,

'one who, in every feeling of his nature, and in every feature of his deportment was every inch a prince'—is matter for grave reflection and sorrowful debate. The American, at least, who shall peruse the concluding pages of the book now under review, and not turn in disgust from the base sycophancy which infects them, is unworthy of his country and his name."

Poe's Americanism was not the robust, genial, confident Americanism of Lowell. But it was less conventional; it was also more searching, more interrogative, more constructive. Its base was not so broad, but its summit was higher. Poe was essentially a frontiersman, Lowell a dweller in the more settled interior.

A quality inseparable from personality and almost inseparable from Americanism is humor. Did Poe have a sense of humor? Did he ever smile or make others smile? There is little evidence of it in his poems and better known stories. Hence we find James Hannay[4] saying and others saying with him, "Poe has no humor." But Poe's best work did not call for humor; it excluded it. "Humor," he says, "with an exception to be made hereafter, is directly antagonistical to that which is the soul of the Muse proper; and the omni-prevalent belief, that melancholy is inseparable from the higher manifestations of the beautiful, is not without a firm basis in nature and in reason. But it so happens that humor and that quality which we have termed the soul of the Muse (imagination) are both essentially aided in their develop-

[4] *The Poetical Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, London, 1863.

ment by the same adventitious assistance—that of rhythm and of rhyme. Thus the only bond between humorous verse and poetry, properly so called, is that they employ in common a certain tool."

Others point as evidence to the stories in which Poe tried to be funny and failed,—to *A Tale of Jerusalem, How to Write a Blackwood Article, The Devil in the Belfry, The Man That Was Used Up, Never Bet the Devil Your Head, The Spectacles, The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq.*, and *X-ing a Paragrab*. That these are flat and irredeemable failures if weighed in the scales of laughter I for one should admit without hesitation. If laughter is heard in them or caused by them it is surely a falsetto cackle. It is not the laughter of Shakespeare or Lamb or Mark Twain or O. Henry. But these futile efforts do not prove that Poe had no sense of humor. They prove only that, if he did, he could not put it into literature. He could not fuse it with his other constructive qualities. He could not make it merchantable as a social commodity.

But he could make it felt in his criticisms of foolish books. When he was asked by Griswold to name certain selections from his writings that might be considered fairly representative, he replied that among his "funny" pieces the review of Flaccus would do as well as anything else. Flaccus was Thomas Ward, whom Griswold had praised in his *Poets and Poetry of America* and characterized as "a gentleman of elegant leisure." "The sum of his [Ward's] deserts," says Poe, "has been footed up by a *clique* who are in the habit of reckoning units as tens in all cases where champagne and 'elegant leisure' are concerned."

Then follows an extract from Ward's *Worth of Beauty* with characteristic comment:

"*Can* we venture to present our readers with a specimen?

> Now roses blush, and violets' eyes,
> And seas reflect the glance of skies;
> And now *that frolic pencil* streaks
> With quaintest tints the tulips' cheeks;
> Now jewels bloom in secret worth
> Like blossoms of the inner earth;
> Now painted birds are pouring round
> The beauty and the wealth of sound;
> Now sea-shells glance with quivering ray,
> Too rare to seize, too fleet to stay,
> And hues outdazzling all the rest
> Are dashed profusely on the west,
> While rainbows seem to palettes changed,
> Whereon the motley tints are ranged.
> But soft the moon *that pencil* tipped,
> As though, in liquid radiance dipped,
> A likeness of the sun it drew,
> But flattered him with pearlier hue;
> Which haply spilling runs astray,
> And blots with light the milky way;
> While stars besprinkle all the air
> Like spatterings of *that pencil* there.

"All this by the way of *exalting* the subject. The moon is made a painter and the rainbow a palette. And the moon has a pencil (*that* pencil!) which she dips, by way of a brush, in the liquid radiance, (the colors on a palette are *not* liquid,) and then *draws* (not paints) a likeness of the sun; but, in the attempt, plasters him too 'pearly,' puts it on too thick; the consequence of which is that some of the paint is spilt, and 'runs astray' and besmears the milky way, and 'spatters' the rest of the sky with stars! We can only say that a very singular picture was spoilt in the making."

This is Poe's method in all of the "funny" reviews. He probably took his cue from Macaulay whom he greatly admired though with qualifications. But Poe made the method his own. Instead of denouncing *ab extra,* he places a specimen before the reader, punctures it, and lets the nonsense and impropriety dribble out.

Of Rufus Dawes, author of *Geraldine,* Griswold had written, "As a poet the standing of Mr. Dawes is as yet unsettled." Poe thought otherwise:

> He laid her gently down, of sense bereft,
> And sunk his picture on her bosom's snow,
> And close beside these lines in blood he left:
> "Farewell forever, Geraldine, I go
> Another woman's victim—dare I tell?
> 'Tis Alice!—curse us, Geraldine!—farewell!"

"There is no possibility of denying the fact: this *is* a droll piece of business. The lover brings forth a miniature, (Mr. Dawes has a passion for miniatures,) *sinks* it in the bosom of the lady, cuts his finger, and writes with the blood an epistle, (*where* is not specified, but we presume he indites it upon the bosom as it is 'close beside' the picture,) in which epistle he announces that he is 'another woman's victim,' giving us to understand that he himself is a woman after all, and concluding with the delicious bit of Billingsgate

> dare I tell?
> 'Tis Alice!—curse us, Geraldine!—farewell!

We suppose, however, that 'curse us' is a misprint; for why should Geraldine curse both herself and her lover?—it should have been 'curse it!' no doubt. The whole passage, perhaps, would have read better thus—

> oh, my eye!
> 'Tis Alice!—d——n it, Geraldine!—good bye!"

In his review of *The Sacred Mountains,* by J. T. Headley, a prose work, Poe satirizes by calling attention to the familiar omniscience that Headley displays in regard to events in which, thinks Poe, more reverence and more reserve should have been shown. Headley's long passage about the Crucifixion begins: "How heaven regarded this disaster, and the Universe felt at the sight, I cannot tell." Upon which Poe comments thus:

"Mr. Headley is a mathematical man. Moreover he is a modest man; for he confesses (no doubt with tears in his eyes) that really there is one thing that he does not know. 'How Heaven regarded this disaster, and the Universe felt at the sight, I cannot tell.' Only think of that! *I* cannot!—*I,* Headley, really cannot tell how the Universe 'felt' once upon a time! This is downright bashfulness on the part of Mr. Headley. He *could* tell if he would only try. Why did he not inquire? Had he demanded of the Universe how it felt, can any one doubt that the answer would have been—'Pretty well, I thank you, my dear Headley; how do you feel yourself?' "

The trail of Poe's humor may be interestingly traced in his comments on poems modeled upon his own. He has often been accused, and justly, of seeing plagiarism where no one else could see it; but in the following excerpt no reader will question that his scent was true or that the plagiarist got any less than his deserts:

"Here is a passage from another little ballad of mine, called *Lenore,* first published in 1830:

How shall the ritual, then, be read—the requiem how
be sung
By you—by yours, the evil eye—by yours, the slan-
derous tongue
That did to death the innocence that died, and died
so young?

"And here is a passage from *The Penance of Roland,* by Henry B. Hirst, published in 'Graham's Magazine' for January, 1848:

Mine the tongue that wrought this evil—mine the false
and slanderous tongue
That done to death the Lady Gwineth—Oh, my soul is
sadly wrung!
"Demon! devil," groaned the warrior, "devil of *the evil*
eye!"

I do *not* object [concludes Poe] to his stealing my verses; but I *do* object to his stealing them in bad grammar. My quarrel with him is *not,* in short, that he *did* this thing, but that he *has went and done did it.*"

Scores of passages like these, together with his instant recognition and loyal defense of the first efforts of a young English writer known then only as "Boz," are evidence that Poe was very far from being the stark, solemn, unsmiling figure that so many picture him. He could even laugh at himself. When he had won the hundred-dollar prize in 1833 and Mr. Latrobe, one of the committee of award, asked the unknown young writer what else he had for publication, he replied that he was engaged on a voyage to the moon. "And at once," says Mr. Latrobe, "he began to describe the journey with so much animation that for all I now remember, I may have fancied myself the companion of his aerial journey. When he had finished his description, he apologized for his excitability, *which*

he laughed at himself." Indeed Poe's smile—it is not likely that he ever laughed boisterously—was a noticeable and memorable characteristic of his manner and expression. "I meet Mr. Poe very often at the receptions," wrote a friend to Mrs. Whitman, when Poe was living in New York. "He is the observed of all observers. His stories are thought wonderful, and to hear him repeat *The Raven,* which he does very quietly, is an event in one's life. People seem to think there is something uncanny about him, and the strangest stories are told, and, what is more, *believed,* about his mesmeric experiences,[5] at the mention of which he always smiles. His smile is captivating."

Captivating, too, was the genial, affectionate, playful manner of Poe in the privacy of his own home. After 1842 there was, it is true, the deepening and saddening solicitude for Virginia's health; but there was also a love, a sympathy, an unselfishness that wrought expansively upon all who dwelt within. Mrs. Frances Sargent Osgood, the writer, knew Poe in the little home at 85 Amity Street, New York, and has left a sketch that should lay forever the specter of brooding and habitual melancholy that still parades itself as Edgar Allan Poe. On her deathbed, a few months after Poe's death, Mrs. Osgood wrote:

"It was in his own simple yet poetical home that to me the character of Edgar Poe appeared in its most

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[5]Poe refers to these "experiences" in his *Marginalia*: "The Swedenborgians inform me that they have discovered all that I said in a magazine article, entitled 'Mesmeric Revelation,' to be absolutely true, although at first they were very strongly inclined to doubt my veracity—a thing which, in that particular instance, I never dreamed of not doubting myself. The story is a pure fiction from beginning to end."

beautiful light. Playful, affectionate, witty, alternately docile and wayward as a petted child, for his young, gentle, and idolized wife, and for all who came, he had, even in the midst of his most harassing literary duties, a kind word, a pleasant smile, a graceful and courteous attention. At his desk beneath the romantic picture of his loved and lost Lenore, he would sit, hour after hour, patient, assiduous, and uncomplaining, tracing, in an exquisitely clear chirography and with almost superhuman swiftness, the lightning thoughts—the 'rare and radiant fancies'—as they flashed through his wonderful and ever-wakeful brain. I recollect, one morning, toward the close of his residence in this city, when he seemed unusually gay and lighthearted. Virginia, his sweet wife, had written me a pressing invitation to come to them; and I, who never could resist her affectionate summons, and who enjoyed his society far more in his own home than elsewhere, hastened to Amity Street. I found him just completing his series of papers entitled *The Literati of New York*. 'See,' said he, displaying in laughing triumph several little rolls of narrow paper (he always wrote thus for the press), 'I am going to show you by the difference of length in these the different degrees of estimation in which I hold all you literary people. In each of these one of you is rolled up and fully discussed. Come, Virginia, help me!' And one by one they unfolded them. At last they came to one which seemed interminable. Virginia laughingly ran to one corner of the room with one end, and her husband to the opposite with the other. 'And whose lengthened sweetness long drawn out is that?' said I. 'Hear her!' he cried. 'Just as if her little vain heart didn't tell her it's herself!'"

But no appraisal of Poe's personality or of his relatedness to his age would be at all complete without some mention of his attitude to religion. Here again the poems and stories leave us in the dark; but there is abundant evidence from other sources that from childhood, when he went regularly to church with Mrs. Allan,[6] to that last hour when he asked Mrs. Moran if she thought there was any hope for him hereafter, God and the Bible were fundamental in his thinking. It is equally evident that, though living in a sceptical age, an age in which science seemed to be weakening the foundations of long cherished beliefs, and being himself enamored of scientific hypothesis and speculative forecast, Poe remained untouched by current forms of unbelief. It is hard to understand what Mr. Woodberry means when he records the fact that Mrs. Moran read to the dying poet the fourteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel and adds: "It is the only mention of religion in his entire life."[7] If the mere reading of the Bible to Poe, not by him, be construed as a "mention of religion" in his life, what shall be said of his own familiarity with the Bible, of his keen interest in biblical research, of his oft-expressed belief in the truth of the Bible, or of his final and impassioned defense, in *Eureka,* of the sovereignty of the God of the Bible?

Poe's intimate knowledge of the Bible might be traced in the many allusions that he makes to Bible history and Bible imagery, but more than mere knowledge is seen in the conscious and vivid imitation of

[6] See *The Complete Poems of Edgar Allan Poe,* by J. H. Whitty, 1917, p. XXIV.

[7] *The Life of Edgar Allan Poe* (1909), vol. II, p. 345.

Bible style that he achieves in many of his greatest prose passages. No one could have written *Shadow, a Parable* or *Silence, a Fable* unless he had so communed with the Old Testament prophets as to catch both the form and the spirit of their utterance. In dignity and elevation of thought, in faultlessness of keeping, in utter simplicity of style and structure, Poe's workmanship in these two selections alone would place him not only among the masters of English prose but among the still smaller number of those whose mastery seems not so much a homage to ancient models as an illumination from the same central sun.

Poe's interest in the discoveries that were beginning to throw new light upon many perplexing problems in the Bible was not the interest of the antiquarian. There was little of the antiquarian in his nature. It was the interest of one who feels an instinctive fellowship with all forms of progressive thought. "I read all the time," says Edison,[8] "on astronomy, chemistry, biology, physics, music, metaphysics, mechanics, and other branches—political economy, electricity, and, in fact, *all things that are making for progress in the world.*" Poe might have said the same. It was the forward movement, the widening horizon, the latent possibilities of a subject that interested Poe, rather than the elemental nature of the subject itself. Landscape gardening, mesmerism, cryptography, metaphysical speculation, the nebular hypothesis, the new science or pseudo-science of aeronautics, the explorations then making in the Pacific Ocean and the South Seas, Maury's additions to ma-

[8] *Life of Edison*, by Dyer and Martin, vol. II, p. 764.

rine lore, the latent results of the gold-excitement in California, these appealed to Poe not so much in themselves as through the enfolded sense of something greater yet to be. They were open doors rather than reservoirs. They were frontier subjects and out of each of them he wrought literature.

If he did not make literature out of the results of Bible discovery in Oriental lands, he at least left on record his familiarity with the subject and his prompt recognition of the part that such discoveries were destined to play in the interpretation of the Old and the New Testament. Though he did not live to greet any of the discoveries of Sir Henry Rawlinson, "the father of Assyriology," Poe's review of *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia, Petræa, and the Holy Land,* by John Lloyd Stephens, the New Jersey lawyer, shows the spirit in which he would have welcomed the work of the great English Orientalist:

"Viewed only as one of a class of writings whose direct tendency is to throw light upon the Book of Books, it has strong claim upon the attention of all who read. While the vast importance of critical and philological research in dissipating the obscurities and determining the exact sense of the Scriptures cannot be too readily conceded, it may be doubted whether the collateral illustration derivable from records of travel be not deserving at least equal consideration. Certainly the evidence thus afforded, exerting an enkindling influence upon the popular imagination, and so taking palpable hold upon the popular understanding, will not fail to become in time a most powerful because easily available instrument in the downfall of unbelief.

Infidelity itself has often afforded unwilling and unwitting testimony to the truth. It is surprising to find with what unintentional precision both Gibbon and Volney (among others) have used, for the purpose of *description,* in their accounts of nations and countries, the identical phraseology employed by the inspired writers when foretelling the most improbable event. In this manner scepticism has been made the root of belief, and the providence of the Deity has been no less remarkable in the extent and nature of the means for bringing to light the evidence of his accomplished word, than in working the accomplishment itself."

Later on in this review Poe avows his belief in the literal meaning and literal fulfilment of Bible predictions. The italics are of course Poe's:

"We look upon the *literalness* of the understanding of the Bible predictions as an *essential* feature in prophecy—conceiving minuteness of detail to have been but a portion of the providential plan of the Deity for bringing more visibly to light, in after-ages, the *evidence* of the fulfilment of his word. No general meaning attached to a prediction, no general fulfilment of such prediction, could carry, to the reason of mankind, inferences so unquestionable, as its particular and minutely incidental accomplishment. General statements, except in rare instances, are susceptible of misinterpretation or misapplication: details admit no shadow of ambiguity. That, in many striking cases, the words of the prophets have been brought to pass in every particular of a series of minutiæ, whose very meaning was unintelligible before the period of fulfil-

ment, is a truth that few are so utterly stubborn as to deny. We mean to say that, in *all* instances, the most strictly literal interpretation will apply."

He inserts also in the same review his proffered emendation of *Isaiah* XXXIV, 10, quoting the original Hebrew in Hebrew letters. Poe was very proud of this achievement and repeats his newly acquired Oriental lore several times in later years, though one must sympathize with him in his repetitions because the typographical outfit was not again equal to the reproduction of the awesome and erudite Hebrew originals. Of course he has been called a charlatan and worse for intimating a knowledge of Hebrew which he did not possess. But surely his pride in the matter is pardonable. It was a very small hoax. Doctor Charles Anthon, of New York, had given him in a letter (June 1, 1837) all the information that was needed, and Poe used it, making much of the Hebrew characters that Doctor Anthon had furnished. But Doctor Anthon's letter was in answer to one from Poe, asking whether the emendation was borne out by the Hebrew text. Poe nowhere claims familiarity with Hebrew or even originality in his proffered reading of the text.

Poe's belief in the Bible, his aversion to scepticism, and his assurance of the immortality of the soul find frequent assertion in his less known works. He commends the inaugural address of the President of Hampden-Sidney College because it shows "a vein of that truest of all philosophy, the philosophy of the Christian." He believed that the lines,

> Trifles, like straws, upon the surface flow,
> He who would search for pearls must dive below,

embodied a false philosophy: "Witness the principles of our divine faith—that moral mechanism by which the simplicity of a child may overbalance the wisdom of a man." In reviewing *Zanoni* he says: "All that is truly noble in Bulwer's imaginary doctrines of the Rosicrucians is stolen from the pure precepts of our holy religion." Knowledge of nature, says Poe, adds to our knowledge of God, and Macaulay's assertion that theology is not a progressive science is declared to be false and misleading:

"Were the indications we derive from science, of the nature and designs of Deity, and thence, by inference, of man's destiny,—were these indications proof *direct*, it is then very true that no advance in science could strengthen them; for, as the essayist justly observes, 'nothing can be added to the force of the argument which the mind finds in every beast, bird and flower;' but, since these indications are rigidly analogical, every step in human knowledge, every astronomical discovery, in especial, throws additional light upon the august subject, by *extending the range of analogy*. That we know no more, to-day, of the nature of Deity, of its purposes, and thus of man himself, than we did even a dozen years ago, is a proposition disgracefully absurd. 'If Natural Philosophy,' says a greater than Macaulay, 'should continue to be improved in its various branches, the bounds of moral philosophy would be enlarged also.' These words of the prophetic Newton are felt to be true, and will be fulfilled."

It was the scepticism of Lord Bolingbroke which, according to Poe, rendered nearly half of the viscount's work comparatively worthless:

"The philosophical essays, occupying two of the volumes on our table, are comparatively valueless, and inferior, both in style and matter, to the political tracts. They are deeply imbued with the sceptical opinions of the author, and we should have willingly seen them omitted in this edition, if it were possible to get a complete one, with nearly one half of the author's works left out. Little, therefore, as we value the philosophical works of Bolingbroke, we commend the publishers for not expunging them as too many others have done."

"Twenty years ago," says Poe, writing in 1844, "credulity was the characteristic trait of the mob, incredulity the distinctive feature of the philosophic; *now* the case is conversed. The wise are wisely averse from disbelief. To be sceptical is no longer evidence either of information or of wit."

"No man doubts the immortality of the soul," declares Poe, "yet of all truths this truth of immortality is the most difficult to prove by any mere series of syllogisms." And later: "However well a man may reason on the great topics of God and immortality, he will be forced to admit tacitly in the end, that God and immortality are things to be felt rather than demonstrated." There was a time, however, when Poe believed that man's immortality could be proved:

"Indeed, to our own mind, the *only* irrefutable argument in support of the soul's immortality—or, rather, the only conclusive proof of man's alternate dissolution and rejuvenescence *ad infinitum*—is to be found in analogies deduced from the modern established theory of

the nebular cosmogony. This cosmogony *demonstrates* that all existing bodies in the universe are formed of a nebular matter, a rare ethereal medium, pervading space; shows the mode and laws of formation, and *proves* that all things are in a perpetual state of progress; that nothing in nature is *perfected*."

Not a proof but an indication of immortality, "a forethought of the loveliness to come," "a prescient ecstasy of the beauty beyond the grave," Poe found in poetry:

"He who shall merely sing with whatever rapture, in however harmonious strains, or with however vivid a truth of imitation, of the sights and sounds which greet him in common with all mankind—he, we say, has yet failed to prove his divine title. There is still a longing unsatisfied, which he has been impotent to fulfill. There is still a thirst unquenchable, which to allay he has shown us no crystal springs. This burning thirst belongs to the *immortal* essence of man's nature. It is equally a consequence and an indication of his perennial life. It is the desire of the moth for the star. It is not the mere appreciation of the beauty before us. It is a wild effort to reach the beauty above. It is a forethought of the loveliness to come. It is a passion to be satisfied by no sublunary sights, or sounds, or sentiments, and the soul thus athirst strives to allay its fever in futile efforts at *creation*. Inspired with a prescient ecstasy of the beauty beyond the grave, it struggles by multiform novelty of combination among the things and thoughts of Time, to anticipate some portion of that loveliness whose very ele-

ments, perhaps, appertain solely to Eternity. And the result of such effort, on the part of souls fittingly constituted, is alone what mankind have agreed to denominate Poetry."

But *Eureka,* published in 1848, contains more of Poe's matured personality, more of his spiritual autobiography, than any other product of his pen. For seven years at least the main conception of this prose-poem absorbed Poe as no other constructive thought had ever absorbed him before. He seemed consciously in the grip not of a marginal truth but of a central and star-ypointing truth. *"What I here propound,"* he writes in his brief preface, *"is true*:—therefore it cannot die:—or if by any means it be now trodden down so that it die, it will 'rise again to the Life Everlasting.'" Virginia's death with its long but foreseen approach had thrown him starkly back upon the problem of life here and its expansion or extinction hereafter. The companionship that he needed in these tense hours of composition was now furnished by Mrs. Clemm. "When he was composing *Eureka,*" she wrote, "we used to walk up and down the garden, his arm around me, mine around him, until I was so tired I could not walk. He would stop every few minutes and explain his ideas to me, and ask if I understood him."

Eureka is more than a demonstration that Poe's intellect and imagination were functioning at their maximum during those lonesome latter years; it reveals that, above all the doubt and darkness and decay that seem to glimmer through his poems and stories, there shone at last the clear light of an abiding conviction that

God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world.

Two passages must suffice. The echo of the first seems heard in a line of Tennyson's *In Memoriam,*

One God, one law, one element.

Poe writes:

"That Nature and the God of Nature are distinct, no thinking being can long doubt. By the former we imply merely the laws of the latter. But with the very idea of God, omnipotent, omniscient, we entertain, also, the idea of the *infallibility* of his laws. With Him there being neither Past nor Future—with Him all being *Now*—do we not insult him in supposing his laws so contrived as not to provide for every possible contingency?—or, rather, what idea *can* we have of any possible contingency, except that it is at once a result and a manifestation of his laws? He who, divesting himself of prejudice, shall have the rare courage to think absolutely for himself, cannot fail to arrive, in the end, at the condensation of *laws* into *Law*—cannot fail of reaching the conclusion that *each law of Nature is dependent at all points upon all other laws,* and that all are but consequences of one primary exercise of the Divine Volition. Such is the principle of the Cosmogony which, with all necessary deference, I here venture to suggest and to maintain."

Just as Tennyson asked that *Crossing the Bar* be placed last in all editions of his poems, so Poe might well have asked that the close of *Eureka*—his swan song—be viewed as the terminus of all that he had

thought or dreamed or hoped or suffered. If "Nevermore" seem at times the refrain of all of his singing, "Evermore" was the note on which he closed; if despair seem the companion of his more solitary moods, it was only that faith and hope might abide with him at the end; if death seem to loom too large and menacing in his visions, it was over and beyond its vanishing rim that he saw rise the beckoning and unclouded life:

"These creatures [animate and inanimate] are all, too, more or less conscious Intelligences; conscious, first, of a proper identity; conscious, secondly and by faint indeterminate glimpses, of an identity with the Divine Being of whom we speak—of an identity with God. Of the two classes of consciousness, fancy that the former will grow weaker, the latter stronger, during the long succession of ages which must elapse before these myriads of individual Intelligences become blended—when the bright stars become blended—into One. Think that the sense of individual identity will be gradually merged in the general consciousness—that Man, for example, ceasing imperceptibly to feel himself Man, will at length attain that awfully triumphant epoch when he shall recognize his existence as that of Jehovah. In the meantime bear in mind that all is Life—Life—Life within Life—the less within the greater, and all within the *Spirit Divine*."

III

And this is the man they call detached from the life about him, unaligned with the problems of his day, uninterested in the things that interested all others, "an

exotic with no roots in the soil of his nativity," neither a person nor a personality but a "fantastically disembodied" spirit. If Hawthorne, the man, were similarly interpreted, if he were judged solely from his greatest works, we should think of him as tortured day and night by a brooding sense of guilt; we should picture him as living under the shadow of a curse, merited or inherited, that left no peace to his stricken conscience. It would be a false conception, however, because we know from other sources that Hawthorne was not abnormal in the pathological sense. But in the case of Poe there have been no other sources. The stories and poems have been requisitioned as autobiography, as the only autobiography. They *are* the autobiography of the artist, an artist who has again and again recorded his conviction that art is concerned primarily with beauty, and that beauty, to be appealing, must be garmented in strangeness.

But Poe's personality has also been interpreted in terms not of his art but of a habit that clung to him to the last. It is needless to go into the old sifted and re-sifted question of the exact amount of alcohol necessary to render Poe irresponsible. There is no doubt that he drank to excess and more frequently than his defenders have admitted. There is no doubt also that he fought the habit, fostered by inheritance and environment, with every power of will and every prompting of duty that he could muster. The evidence is plain that the temptation to drink was strongest during those quick descents from confident hope and exaltation to pitiless and intolerable dejection. George Eliot writes of "the still melancholy that I love." Poe did not love it, nor was it habitual with him. His tem-

perament was mercurial, and to break the fall from elation to hopelessness he drank. Indulgence was followed not by angry retort to those that sought to counsel him but by profound humiliation and by promise of reform. To assert that Poe found poetic inspiration in drink is to fly in the face of all the known facts. Drink did not help him; it hurt him, and he fought it as a foe of art, of thought, of personality, and of self-respect. The very nature of his work,—with its meticulous care in details, its orderliness, its niceties of analysis, its interplay of reason and logic, its symmetry of construction, makes impossible the conjecture that he could have wrought it or any part of it while excited by drink. Poe drank but he was not a drunkard; he was dissipated but not dissolute.

No one has stated the case better than his friend, F. W. Thomas:

"If he took but one glass of weak wine or beer or cider the Rubicon of the cup was passed with him, and it almost always ended in excess and sickness. But he fought against the propensity as hard as ever Coleridge fought against it, and I am inclined to believe, after his sad experience and suffering, if he could have gotten office with a fixed salary, beyond the need of literary labour, that he would have redeemed himself —at least at this time. The accounts of his derelictions in this respect when I knew him were very much exaggerated. I have seen men who drank bottles of wine to Poe's wine glasses who yet escaped all imputation of intemperance. His was one of those temperaments whose only safety is in total abstinence. He suffered terribly after any indiscretion. And after all what Byron said of Sheridan was true of Poe—

Ah little do they know
That what to them seemed vice might be but woe."

The poems that Poe wrote after the death of Virginia, the addresses that he delivered to applauding audiences, and the unexceptional testimony of the men and women who knew him most intimately during the last three months in Richmond show that there was no bankruptcy of intellect, no collapse of character, no disintegration of personality. "With all his recklessness," says Stedman, warning the reader against making Poe and the unheroic hero of *William Wilson* one and the same, "he was neither vicious nor criminal, and he never succeeded or wished to succeed in putting down his conscience. That stayed by him to the bitter end, and perhaps the end was speedier for its companionship."

Summing up, may we not say that Poe's work will enter upon a still wider stage of influence when it is regarded not as allurement to doubt and despair but as an outcry against them? Is is not unjust to call him the poet laureate of death and decay in the sense in which we call Shelley the poet laureate of love, Wordsworth of nature, Tennyson of trust, or Browning of resolute faith? Poe did not love death; he did not celebrate the charms of doubt or of darkness or of separation. He abhorred them. The desolate lover in *The Raven* does not acquiesce in "Nevermore." It flouts and belies every instinct and intuition of his heart. And in every poem and story of Poe's over which blackness seems to brood, there is the unmistakable note of spiritual protest; there is the evidence of a nature so attuned to love and light, to beauty and harmony, that denial of them or separation from them

is a veritable death-in-life. Poe fathomed darkness but climbed to the light; he became the world's spokesman for those dwelling within the shadow but his feet were already upon the upward slope. Out of it all he emerged victor, not victim.

When I remember that Poe resented the charge of pantheism as keenly as that of atheism, when I recall that he ended his career as thinker and prophet with the chant, "All is Life—Life—Life within Life—the less within the greater, and all within the Spirit Divine," the sunlight seems to fall upon "the misty mid region of Weir," even "the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir;" and Edgar Allan Poe seems no longer our great autumnal genius, heralding an early winter, but the genius of winter itself, a late winter, with spring already at its heart.

CHAPTER III

The Critic

I

Our ultimate knowledge of Poe, however, must rest neither upon his fame nor upon his personality. These are only subsidiary to the deeper knowledge that comes from a first-hand acquaintance with his works. In mere bulk Poe's literary output was not large but it was singularly varied. No other writer of English has attained an equal eminence in literary *genres* as different as criticism, poetry, and the short story. To these must also be added a fourth type for which Stedman[1] has suggested the name "Pastels," or "Impressions," or "Petits Poëmes en Prose." Criticism, however, should come first, for it was through criticism that Poe first made a national reputation; and it is in his criticism that we find the clearest exposition of the literary principles to which, from first to last, he was consistently loyal in the production of his own creative work.

But Poe's criticisms are more than introductions to his own works. They have also a value as historical material in the evolution of American literature. They serve as contemporary witnesses to the supremacy of Cooper, Bryant and Irving, and as heralds of the greater group represented by Longfellow, Lowell,

[1] *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, by Edmund Clarence Stedman and George Edward Woodberry, New York, 1914, vol. I, p. 94.

Whittier, Hawthorne, Emerson, and Holmes. Poe lived in a transition age, when New York was yielding its literary hegemony to New England, and when the South and the West were sounding the first notes in a great regional chorus which, after 1870, was to mark the advent at last of a regionally representative American literature. These movements were noted and recorded by Poe as by no other contemporary critic.

But Poe's critiques have an independent value apart from the time and place that called them forth. They are the comments of one whose genius was preeminently structural. The architecture of prose and verse, especially of the short story and the short poem, appealed to Poe far more than they appealed to any other English or American critic. He did not neglect content, but he was distinctively the builder. His most characteristic reviews are not mere appraisals; they are answers to the question, How might this have been better done? This kind of criticism might easily have degenerated into the analysis of the purely external and comparatively irrelevant. In fact, Griswold said of Poe: "As a critic, he was more remarkable as a dissector of sentences than as a commenter on ideas." But Poe was primarily neither a dissector of sentences nor a commenter on ideas. He dissects sentences and he comments on ideas but only as these make or mar the structural unity, the wholeness of effect, of the piece that he is criticizing. "Totality of effect" became Poe's touchstone at the beginning of his critical career; and words, sounds, rhythms, sentences, paragraphs, stanzas, plot, and background are held to a strict stewardship not on their own account but as joint agents in carrying out the predetermined design.

To compare Poe as a critic with Coleridge or Matthew Arnold or Sainte-Beuve or Taine or Lowell is to compare him with men who wore, it is true, the same livery, but who served under other banners. His criticism was different from theirs because his purpose was different. When I read them, I feel more than I feel in Poe the impact of philosophical suggestions, of wide historical relationships, of literature interpreted as life, and life seen anew through literature. Whether you call their method judicial in the Aristotelian sense, or purely impressionistic, or learnedly historical, the man whose work they are criticizing seems in certain vital ways to live again. I seem to know him as a man and as a thinker, but not as a craftsman. How he succeeded in bodying forth his conceptions, how the man became for the time being the literary artist, how he made an ally of that tested body of truth known as technique, how he differs from me who now think as he thought but am as powerless as before to write as he wrote,—this remains in its original obscurity. But it is this niche in criticism that Poe has come nearer filling than any one else. It is this quality in his critical work that makes him a living force wherever men are "stung by the splendor of a sudden thought" but impotent to impart it. It is this radiation from his criticisms that makes them permanently serviceable not merely to the creative artist in letters but to all those who wish to write or to speak more convergently and thus more effectively.

II

The following extracts are chosen to exemplify the more important aspects of Poe's criticism but espec-

ially the last mentioned. Only one selection, Poe's analysis of *The Raven,* is given complete.

THE FACULTY OF IDENTIFICATION

[A new edition of *Robinson Crusoe,* reviewed in *The Southern Literary Messenger,* January, 1836. The review has an autobiographical significance. It shows also that Poe could admire whole-heartedly a work that has neither plot nor stylistic beauty. The *Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* (1838) is Poe's Robinson Crusoe.]

How fondly do we recur, in memory, to those enchanted days of our boyhood when we first learned to grow serious over "Robinson Crusoe"!—when we first found the spirit of wild adventure enkindling within us; as by the dim fire light, we labored out, line by line, the marvellous import of those pages, and hung breathless and trembling with eagerness over their absorbing—over their enchaining interest! "Nothing farther," as Vapid says, "can be done in that line." Wo, henceforward, to the Defoe who shall prate to us of "undiscovered bournes." There is positively not a square inch of new ground for any future Selkirk. Neither in the Indian, in the Pacific, nor in the Atlantic, has he a shadow of hope. The Southern Ocean has been incontinently ransacked, and in the North—Scoresby, Franklin, Parry, Ross & Co. have been little better than so many salt water Paul Prys.

While Defoe would have been fairly entitled to immortality had he never written "Robinson Crusoe," yet his many other very excellent writings have nearly

faded from our attention, in the superior lustre of the Adventures of the Mariner of York. What better possible species of reputation could the author have desired for that book than the species which it has so long enjoyed? It has become a household thing in nearly every family in Christendom. Yet never was admiration of any work—universal admiration—more indiscriminately or more inappropriately bestowed. Not one person in ten—nay, not one person in five hundred, has, during the perusal of "Robinson Crusoe," the most remote conception that any particle of genius, or even of common talent, has been employed in its creation! Men do not look upon it in the light of a literary performance. Defoe has none of their thoughts—Robinson all. The powers which have wrought the wonder have been thrown into obscurity by the very stupendousness of the wonder they have wrought! We read, and become perfect abstractions in the intensity of our interest—we close the book, and are quite satisfied that we could have written as well ourselves! All this is effected by the potent magic of verisimilitude. Indeed the author of "Crusoe" must have possessed, above all other faculties, what has been termed the faculty of *identification*—that dominion exercised by volition over imagination which enables the mind to lose its own, in a fictitious, individuality. This includes, in a very great degree, the power of abstraction; and with these keys we may partially unlock the mystery of that spell which has so long invested the volume before us.

But a complete analysis of our interest in it cannot be thus afforded. Defoe is largely indebted to his subject. The idea of man in a state of perfect isola-

tion, although often entertained, was never before so comprehensively carried out. Indeed the frequency of its occurrence to the thoughts of mankind argued the extent of its influence on their sympathies, while the fact of no attempt having been made to give an embodied form to the conception, went to prove the difficulty of the undertaking. But the true narrative of Selkirk in 1711, with the powerful impression it then made upon the public mind, sufficed to inspire Defoe with both the necessary courage for his work, and entire confidence in its success. How wonderful has been the result!

THE NOVEL AS HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

[Bulwer's *Rienzi, the Last of the Tribunes,* reviewed in *The Southern Literary Messenger,* February, 1836. The last sentence of this extract is Poe's clearest statement of his adherence to a fundamental principle of democracy.]

But as was said before, we should err radically if we regard "Rienzi" altogether in the light of Romance. Undoubtedly as such—as a fiction, and coming under the title of a novel, it is a glorious, a wonderful conception, and not the less wonderfully and gloriously carried out. What else could we say of a book over which the mind so delightedly lingers in perusal? In its delineations of passion and character—in the fine blending and contrasting of its incidents—in the rich and brilliant tints of its feudal paintings—in a pervading air of chivalry, and grace, and sentiment—in all that can throw a charm over the pages of Romance, the last novel of Bulwer is equal, if not su-

perior, to any of his former productions. Still we would look at the work in a different point of view. It is History. We hesitate not to say that it is History in its truest—in its only true, proper, and philosophical garb. Sismondi's works—were not. There is no greater error than dignifying with the name of History a tissue of dates and details, though the dates be ordinarily correct, and the details indisputably true. Not even with the aid of acute comment will such a tissue satisfy our individual notions of History. To the effect let us look—to the impression rather than to the seal. And how very seldom is any definite impression left upon the mind of the historical reader! How few bear away—even from the pages of Gibbon—Rome and the Romans. Vastly different was the genius of Niebuhr—than whom no man possessed a more discriminative understanding of the uses and the purposes of the pen of the historiographer. But we digress. Bearing in mind that "to contemplate"—ἱστορεῖν[2]—should and must be allowed a more noble and a more expansive acceptation than has been usually given it, we shall often discover in Fiction the essential spirit and vitality of Historic Truth—while Truth itself, in many a dull and lumbering Archive, shall be found guilty of all the inefficiency of Fiction.

"Rienzi," then, is History. But there are other aspects in which it may be regarded with advantage. Let us survey it as a profound and lucid exposition of

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[2]History, from ἱστορεῖν, to contemplate, seems, among the Greeks, to have embraced not only the knowledge of past events, but also Mythology, Esopian and Milesian fables, *Romance*, Tragedy and Comedy. But our business is with things, not words. (Poe's Note.)

the *morale* of Government—of the Philosophies of Rule and Misrule—of the absolute incompatibility of Freedom and Ignorance—Tyranny in the few and Virtue in the many. Let us consider it as something akin to direct evidence that a people is not a mob, nor a mob a people, nor a mob's idol the idol of a people—that in a nation's self is the only security for a nation—and that it is absolutely necessary to model upon the *character* of the governed, the machinery, whether simple or complex, of the governmental legislation.

AN OMEN OF BETTER DAYS FOR SOUTHERN LITERATURE

[*Georgia Scenes,* by Judge Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, reviewed in *The Southern Literary Messenger,* March, 1836. The book has proved a sort of classic of provincial literature. Poe closes his review of about ten pages by saying: "Altogether this very humorous and very clever book forms an era in our reading. It has reached us per mail, and without a cover. We will have it bound forthwith, and give it a niche in our library as a sure omen of better days for the literature of the South."]

This book has reached us anonymously—not to say anomalously—yet it is most heartily welcome. The author, whoever he is, is a clever fellow, imbued with a spirit of the truest humor, and endowed, moreover, with an exquisitely discriminative and penetrating understanding of *character* in general, and of Southern character in particular. And we do not mean to speak of *human* character exclusively. To be sure, our Georgian is *au fait* here too—he is learned in all things appertaining to the biped without feathers. In re-

gard, especially, to that class of southwestern mammalia who come under the generic appellation of "savagerous wild cats," he is a very Theophrastus in duodecimo. But he is not the less at home in other matters. Of geese and ganders he is the La Bruyère, and of good-for-nothing horses the Rochefoucault.

Seriously—if this book were printed in England it would make the fortune of its author. We positively mean what we say—and are quite sure of being sustained in our opinion by all proper judges who may be so fortunate as to obtain a copy of the "Georgia Scenes," and who will be at the trouble of sifting their peculiar merits from amid the *gaucheries* of a Southern publication. Seldom—perhaps never in our lives—have we laughed as immoderately over any book as over the one now before us. If these *scenes* have produced such effect upon *our* cachinnatory nerves—upon *us* who are not "of the merry mood," and, moreover, have not been used to the perusal of somewhat similar things—we are at no loss to imagine what a hubbub they would occasion in the uninitiated regions of Cockaigne. And what would Christopher North say to them?—ah, what would Christopher North say? that is the question. Certainly not a word. But we can fancy the pursing up of his lips, and the long, loud, and jovial resonation of his wicked, uproarious ha! ha's!

From the Preface to the Sketches before us we learn that although they are, generally, nothing more than fanciful combinations of real incidents and characters, still, in some instances, the narratives are literally true. We are told also that the publication of these pieces was commenced, rather more than a year

ago, in one of the Gazettes of the State, and that they were favorably received. "For the last six months," says the author, "I have been importuned by persons from all quarters of the State to give them to the public in the present form." This speaks well for the Georgian taste. But that the publication will *succeed*, in the bookselling sense of the word, is problematical. Thanks to the long-indulged literary supineness of the South, her presses are not as apt in putting forth a *saleable* book as her sons are in concocting a wise one.

COMPARISON VS. IDEALITY

[*The Culprit Fay and Other Poems,* by Joseph Rodman Drake, reviewed in *The Southern Literary Messenger,* April, 1836. The suggestive distinction here made is not that of Coleridge between fancy and imagination. See page 110. Note that Poe's constructive sense leads him to rewrite a passage from *The Culprit Fay*, a striking illustration of the propinquity of theory and practice, of thought and expression, in his own art.]

It is only lately that we have read the "Culprit Fay." This is a poem of six hundred and forty irregular lines, generally iambic, and divided into thirty-six stanzas, of unequal length. The scene of the narrative, as we ascertain from the single line,

> The moon looks down on old *Cronest,*

is principally in the vicinity of West Point on the Hudson.....

It is more than probable that from ten readers of the "Culprit Fay," nine would immediately pronounce

it a poem betokening the most extraordinary powers of imagination, and of these nine, perhaps five or six, poets themselves, and fully impressed with the truth of what we have already assumed, that Ideality is indeed the soul of the Poetic Sentiment, would feel embarrassed between a half-consciousness that they ought to admire the production, and a wonder that they do not. This embarrassment would then arise from an indistinct conception of the results in which Ideality is rendered manifest. Of these results some few are seen in the "Culprit Fay," but the greater part of it is utterly destitute of any evidence of imagination whatever. The general character of the poem will, we think, be sufficiently understood by any one who may have taken the trouble to read our foregoing compendium of the narrative. It will be there seen that what is so frequently termed the imaginative power of this story, lies especially—we should have rather said is thought to lie—in the passages we have quoted, or in others of a precisely similar nature. These passages embody, principally, mere specifications of qualities, of habiliments, of punishments, of occupations, of circumstances, &c., which the poet has believed in unison with the size, firstly, and secondly with the nature of his Fairies. To all which may be added specifications of other animal existences (such as the toad, the beetle, the lance-fly, the fire-fly and the like) supposed also to be in accordance. An example will best illustrate our meaning upon this point —we take it from page 20.

> He put his acorn helmet on;
> It was plumed of the silk of the thistle down:
> The corslet plate that guarded his breast
> Was once the wild bee's golden vest;

His cloak of a thousand mingled dyes,
Was formed of the wings of butterflies;
His shield was the shell of a lady-bug queen,
Studs of gold on a ground of green;[3]
And the quivering lance which he brandished bright
Was the sting of a wasp he had slain in fight.

We shall now be understood. Were any of the admirers of the "Culprit Fay" asked their opinion of these lines, they would most probably speak in high terms of the *imagination* they display. Yet let the most stolid and the most confessedly unpoetical of these admirers only try the experiment, and he will find, possibly to his extreme surprise, that he himself will have no difficulty whatever in substituting for the equipments of the Fairy, as assigned by the poet, other equipments equally comfortable, no doubt, and equally in unison with the preconceived size, character, and other qualities of the equipped. Why, we could accoutre him as well ourselves—let us see.

His blue-bell helmet, we have heard
Was plumed with the down of the humming-bird,
The corslet on his bosom bold
Was once the locust's coat of gold,
His cloak, of a thousand mingled hues,
Was the velvet violet, wet with dews,
His target was the crescent shell
Of the small sea Sidrophel,
And a glittering beam from a maiden's eye
Was the lance which he proudly wav'd on high.

The truth is, that the only requisite for writing verses of this nature, *ad libitum,* is a tolerable acquaintance with the qualities of the objects to be detailed, and a very moderate endowment of the faculty of Comparison—which is the chief constituent of

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[3]Chestnut color, or more slack,
Gold upon a ground of black.
Ben Jonson. (Poe's Note.)

Fancy or the powers of combination. A thousand such lines may be composed without exercising in the least degree the Poetic Sentiment, which is Ideality, Imagination, or the creative ability. And, as we have before said, the greater portion of the "Culprit Fay" is occupied with these, or similar things, and upon such, depends very nearly, if not altogether, its reputation. We select another example from page 25.

> But oh! how fair the shape that lay
> Beneath a rainbow bending bright,
> She seem'd to the entranced Fay
> The loveliest of the forms of light;
> Her mantle was the purple rolled
> At twilight in the west afar;
> 'Twas tied with threads of dawning gold.
> And button'd with a sparkling star.
> Her face was like the lily roon
> That veils the vestal planet's hue;
> Her eyes, two beamlets from the moon
> Set floating in the welkin blue.
> Her hair is like the sunny beam,
> And the diamond gems which round it gleam
> Are the pure drops of dewy even,
> That ne'er have left their native heaven.

Here again the faculty of Comparison is alone exercised, and no mind possessing the faculty in any ordinary degree would find a difficulty in substituting for the materials employed by the poet other materials equally as good. But viewed as mere efforts of the Fancy and without reference to Ideality, the lines just quoted are much worse than those which were taken from page 20. A congruity was observed in the accoutrements of the Ouphe, and we had no trouble in forming a distinct conception of his appearance when so accoutred. But the most vivid powers of Comparison can attach no definite idea to even "the loveliest form of light," when habited in a mantle of "rolled

purple tied with threads of dawn and buttoned with a star," and sitting at the same time under a rainbow with "beamlet" eyes and a visage of "lily roon."

But if these things evince no Ideality in their author, do they not excite it in others?—if so, we must conclude, that without being himself imbued with the Poetic Sentiment, he has still succeeded in writing a fine poem—a supposition as we have before endeavored to show, not altogether paradoxical. Most assuredly we think not. In the case of a great majority of readers the only sentiment aroused by compositions of this order is a species of vague wonder at the writer's *ingenuity,* and it is this indeterminate sense of wonder which passes but too frequently current for the proper influence of the Poetic power. For our own part we plead guilty to a predominant sense of the ludicrous while occupied in the perusal of the poem before us—a sense whose promptings we sincerely and honestly endeavored to quell, perhaps not altogether successfully, while penning our compend of the narrative. That a feeling of this nature is utterly at war with the Poetic Sentiment, will not be disputed by those who comprehend the character of the sentiment itself. This character is finely shadowed out in that popular although vague idea so prevalent throughout all time, that a species of melancholy is inseparably connected with the higher manifestations of the beautiful. But with the numerous and seriously-adduced incongruities of the "Culprit Fay," we find it generally impossible to connect other ideas than those of the ridiculous. We are bidden, in the first place, and in a tone of sentiment and language adapted to the loftiest breathings of the Muse, to imagine a race of Fair-

ies in the vicinity of West Point. We are told, with a grave air, of their camp, of their king, and especially of their sentry, who is a woodtick. We are informed that an Ouphe of about an inch in height has committed a deadly sin in falling in love with a mortal maiden, who may, very possibly, be six feet in her stockings. The consequence to the Ouphe is—what? Why, that he has "dyed his wings," "broken his elfin chain," and "quenched his flame-wood lamp." And he is therefore sentenced to what? To catch a spark from the tail of a falling star, and a drop of water from the belly of a sturgeon. What are his equipments for the first adventure? An acorn-helmet, a thistle-down plume, a butterfly cloak, a ladybug shield, cockle-seed spurs, and a fire-fly horse. How does he ride to the second? On the back of a bull-frog. What are his opponents in the one? "Drizzly-mists," "sulphur and smoke," "shadowy hands and flame-shot tongues." What in the other? "Mailed shrimps," "prickly prongs," "blood-red leeches," "jellied quarls," "stony star fishes," "lancing squabs" and "soldier crabs." Is that all? No—Although only an inch high he is in imminent danger of seduction from a "sylphid queen," dressed in a mantle of "rolled purple," "tied with threads of dawning gold," "buttoned with a sparkling star," and sitting under a rainbow with "beamlet eyes" and a countenance of "lily roon." In our account of all this matter we have had reference to the book—and to the book alone. It will be difficult to prove us guilty in any degree of distortion or exaggeration. Yet such are the puerilities we daily find ourselves called upon to admire, as among the loftiest efforts of the human mind, and which not to

assign a rank with the proud trophies of the matured and vigorous genius of England, is to prove ourselves at once a fool, a maligner, and no patriot.[4]

As an instance of what may be termed the sublimely ridiculous we quote the following lines from page 17.

> With sweeping tail and quivering fin,
> Through the wave the sturgeon flew,
> And like the heaven-shot javelin,
> He sprung above the waters blue.
>
> Instant as the star-fall light,
> He plunged into the deep again,
> But left an arch of silver bright
> The rainbow of the moony main.
>
> *It was a strange and lovely sight*
> *To see the puny goblin there;*
> *He seemed an angel form of light*
> *With azure wing and sunny hair,*
> *Throned on a cloud of purple fair*
> *Circled with blue and edged with white*
> *And sitting at the fall of even*
> *Beneath the bow of summer heaven.*

The verses here italicized, if considered without their context, have a certain air of dignity, elegance, and chastity of thought. If however we apply the context, we are immediately overwhelmed with the grotesque. It is impossible to read without laughing, such expressions as "It was a strange and lovely sight"—"He seemed an angel form of light"—

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[4] A review of Drake's poems, emanating from one of our proudest Universities, does not scruple to make use of the following language in relation to the *Culprit Fay*. *"It is, to say the least, an elegant production, the purest specimen of Ideality we have ever met with, sustaining in each incident a most bewitching interest. Its very title is enough,"* &c. &c. We quote these expressions as a fair specimen of the general unphilosophical and adulatory tenor of our criticism. (Poe's Note.)

"And sitting at the fall of even, beneath the bow of summer heaven" applied to a Fairy—a goblin—an Ouphe—half an inch high, dressed in an acorn helmet and butterfly-cloak, and sitting on the water in a muscle-shell, with a "brown-backed sturgeon" turning somersets over his head.

In a world where evil is a mere consequence of good, and good a mere consequence of evil—in short where all of which we have any conception is good or bad only by comparison—we have never yet been fully able to appreciate the validity of that decision which would debar the critic from enforcing upon his readers the merits or demerits of a work by placing it in juxtaposition with another. It seems to us that an adage based in the purest ignorance has had more to do with this popular feeling than any just reason founded upon common sense. Thinking thus, we shall have no scruple in illustrating our opinion in regard to what *is not* Ideality or the Poetic Power, by an example of what *is*.[5]

We have already given the description of the Sylphid Queen in the "Culprit Fay." In the "Queen Mab" of Shelley a Fairy is thus introduced—

> Those who had looked upon the sight
> Passing all human glory,
> Saw not the yellow moon,
> Saw not the mortal scene,

[5]As examples of entire poems of the purest ideality, we would cite the *Prometheus Vinctus* of Æschylus, the *Inferno* of Dante, Cervantes' *Destruction of Numantia*, the *Comus* of Milton, Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, Burns' *Tam O' Shanter*, the *Auncient Mariner*, the *Christabel*, and the *Kubla Khan* of Coleridge; and most especially the *Sensitive Plant* of Shelley, and the *Nightingale* of Keats. We have seen American poems evincing the faculty in the highest degree. (Poe's Note.)

Heard not the night wind's rush,
Heard not an earthly sound,
Saw but the fairy pageant,
Heard but the heavenly strains
That filled the lonely dwelling—

and thus described—

The Fairy's frame was slight; yon fibrous cloud
That catches but the faintest tinge of even,
And which the straining eye can hardly seize
When melting into eastern twilight's shadow,
Were scarce so thin, so slight; but the fair star
That gems the glittering coronet of morn,
Sheds not a light so mild, so powerful,
As that which, bursting from the Fairy's form,
Spread a purpureal halo round the scene,
Yet with an undulating motion,
Swayed to her outline gracefully.

In these exquisite lines the Faculty of mere Comparison is but little exercised—that of Ideality in a wonderful degree. It is probable that in a similar case the poet we are now reviewing would have formed the face of the Fairy of the "fibrous cloud," her arms of the "pale tinge of even," her eyes of the "fair stars," and her body of the "twilight shadow." Having so done, his admirers would have congratulated him upon his *imagination,* not taking the trouble to think that they themselves could at any moment *imagine* a Fairy of materials equally as good, and conveying an equally distinct idea. Their mistake would be precisely analogous to that of many a schoolboy who admires the imagination displayed in "Jack the Giant-Killer," and is finally rejoiced at discovering his own imagination to surpass that of the author, since the monsters destroyed by Jack are only about forty feet in height, and he himself has no trouble in imagining some of one hundred and forty. It will be

seen that the Fairy of Shelley is not a mere compound of incongruous natural objects, inartificially put together, and unaccompanied by any *moral* sentiment—but a being, in the illustration of whose nature some physical elements are used collaterally as adjuncts, while the main conception springs immediately *or thus apparently springs,* from the brain of the poet, enveloped in the moral sentiments of grace, of color, of motion—of the beautiful, of the mystical, of the august—in short of *the ideal.*[6]

It is by no means our intention to deny that in the "Culprit Fay" are passages of a different order from those to which we have objected—passages evincing a degree of imagination not to be discovered in the plot, conception, or general execution of the poem. The opening stanza will afford us a tolerable example.

'Tis the middle watch of a summer's night—
The earth is dark but the heavens are bright
Naught is seen in the vault on high
But the moon, and the stars, and the cloudless sky,
And the flood which rolls its milky hue
A river of light on the welkin blue.
The moon looks down on old Cronest,
She mellows the shades of his shaggy breast,
And seems his huge gray form to throw
In a silver cone on the wave below;
His sides are broken by spots of shade,
By the walnut bow and the cedar made,
And through their clustering branches dark
Glimmers and dies the fire-fly's spark—
Like starry twinkles that momently break
Through the rifts of the gathering tempest rack.

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[6]Among things, which not only in our opinion, but in the opinion of far wiser and better men, are to be ranked with the mere prettinesses of the Muse, are the positive similes so abundant in the writings of antiquity, and so much insisted upon by the critics of the reign of Queen Anne. (Poe's Note.)

There is Ideality in these lines—but except in the case of the words italicized—it is Ideality *not of a high order*. We have, it is true, a collection of natural objects, each individually of great beauty, and, if actually seen as in nature, capable of exciting in any mind, through the means of the Poetic Sentiment more or less inherent in all, a certain sense of the beautiful. But to view such natural objects as they exist, and to behold them through the medium of words, are different things. Let us pursue the idea that such a collection as we have here will produce, of necessity, the Poetic Sentiment, and we may as well make up our minds to believe that a catalogue of such expressions as moon, sky, trees, rivers, mountains, &c., shall be capable of exciting it,—it is merely an extension of the principle. But in the line "the earth is dark, *but* the heavens are bright" besides the simple mention of the "dark earth" "and the bright heavens," we have, directly, the moral sentiment of the brightness of the sky compensating for the darkness of the earth—and thus, indirectly, of the happiness of a future state compensating for the miseries of the present. All this is effected by the simple introduction of the word *but* between the "dark earth" and the "bright heavens"—this introduction, however, was prompted by the Poetic Sentiment, and by the Poetic Sentiment alone. The case is analogous in the expression "glimmers and dies," where the imagination is exalted by the moral sentiment of beauty heightened in dissolution.

In one or two shorter passages of the "Culprit Fay" the poet will recognize the purely ideal, and be able at a glance to distinguish it from that baser alloy upon which we have descanted. We give them without farther comment.

The winds *are whist*, and the owl is still,
The bat in the shelvy rock *is hid*
And naught is heard on the *lonely* hill
But the cricket's chirp and the answer *shrill*
Of the gauze-winged katydid;
And the plaint of the *waiking* whippoorwill
Who mourns *unseen*, and ceaseless sings
Ever a note of wail and wo—

Up to the vaulted firmament
His path the fire-fly courser bent,
And at every gallop on the wind
He flung a glittering spark behind.

He blessed the force of the charmed line
And he banned the water-goblins' spite,
For he saw around in the *sweet moonshine*,
Their little wee faces above the brine,
Giggling and laughing with all their might
At the piteous hap of the Fairy wight.

A PRESENT TENSE WRONGLY USED

[*Notices of the War of* 1812, by John Armstrong, reviewed in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, June, 1836. The extract is a good example of Poe's method of criticizing a mere word but a word that embodies the spirit of an entire book. The review is as timely now as when it was written.]

These "Notices," by the former Secretary of War, are a valuable addition to our history, and to our historical literature—embracing a variety of details which should not have been so long kept from the cognizance of the public. We are grieved, however, to see, even in the opening passages of the work, a piquancy and freedom of expression, in regard to the unhappy sources of animosity between America and the parent land, which can neither to-day nor hereafter answer any possible good end, and may prove an individual

grain in a future mountain of mischief. At page 12, for example:

"Still her abuse of power did not stop here: it was not enough that she thus outraged her rights on the ocean; the bosoms of our bays, the mouths of our rivers, and even the wharves of our harbors, were made the theatres of the most flagitious abuse; and as if determined to leave no cause of provocation untried, the personal rights of our seamen were invaded: and men, owing her no allegiance, nor having any connection with her policy or arms, were forcibly seized, dragged on board her ships of war and made to fight her battles, under the scourge of tyrants and slaves, with whom submission, whether right or wrong, *forms* the whole duty of man."

We object, particularly here to the use of the verb *forms* in the present tense.

THE SPIRIT OF RESEARCH IN OUR NAVY

[*Navigation*, by Matthew Fontaine Maury, reviewed in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, June, 1836. Poe's interest in naval affairs is shown in many passages of his works, and his familiarity with nautical terms is equally evident in the *Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*. In his reviews of Lieutenant Alexander Slidell's books, he comments upon a naval officer now almost forgotten, while in the present review he commends the first publication of one who in later years was to be honored in all lands where naval science is held in esteem.]

This volume, from an officer of our Navy, and a Virginian, strongly commends itself to notice. The

works at present used by our navy and general marine, though in many respects not devoid of merit, have always struck us as faulty in two particulars. They aim at comprising a great multiplicity of details, many of which relate to matters only remotely bearing upon the main objects of the treatise—and they are deficient in that clearness of arrangement, without which, the numerous facts and formulæ composing the body of such works are little else than a mass of confusion. The extraction of the really useful rules and principles from the multifarious matters with which they are thus encumbered, is a task for which seamen are little likely to have either time or inclination, and it is therefore not surprising that our highly intelligent navy exhibits so many instances of imperfect knowledge upon points which are elementary and fundamental in the science of navigation.

We think that Mr. Maury has, to a considerable degree, avoided the errors referred to; and while his work comprises a sufficient and even copious statement of the rules and facts important to be known in the direction of a ship, he has succeeded, by a judicious arrangement of particulars and by clearly wrought numerical examples, in presenting them in a disembarrassed and very intelligible form. With great propriety he has rejected many statements and rules which in the progress of nautical science have fallen into disuse, and in his selection of methods of computation, has, in general, kept in view those modern improvements in this branch of practical mathematics in which simplicity and accuracy are most happily combined. Much attention to numerical correctness seems to pervade the work. Its style is concise without

being obscure. The diagrams are selected with taste, and the engraving and typography, especially that of the tables, are worthy of the highest praise.

Such, we think, are the merits of the work before us—merits which, it must be admitted, are of the first importance in a book designed for a practical manual. To attain them required the exercise of a discriminating judgment, guided by a thorough acquaintance with all the points in natural science which are of interest to seamen.

There are particulars in the work which we think objectionable, but they are of minor importance, and would probably be regarded as scarcely deserving criticism.

The spirit of literary improvement has been awakened among the officers of our gallant navy. We are pleased to see that science also is gaining votaries from its ranks. Hitherto how little have they improved the golden opportunities of knowledge which their distant voyages held forth, and how little have they enjoyed the rich banquet which nature spreads for them in every clime they visit! But the time is coming when, imbued with a taste for science and a spirit of research, they will become ardent explorers of the regions in which they sojourn. Freighted with the knowledge which observation only can impart, and enriched with collections of objects precious to the student of nature, their return after the perils of a distant voyage will then be doubly joyful. The enthusiast in science will anxiously await their coming, and add his cordial welcome to the warm greetings of relatives and friends.

GOVERNMENT AND THE FORMS OF GOVERNMENT

[*England in* 1835, by Frederick von Raumer, translated from the German by Sarah Austin and H. E. Lloyd, reviewed in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, July, 1836. Poe touches on an old theme here but the years have only accentuated the validity of his warning.]

This work will form an era in the reading annals of the more contemplative portions of Americans—while its peculiar merits will be overlooked by the multitude. The broad and solid basis of its superstructure—the scrupulous accuracy of its *data*—the disdain of mere *logic* in its deductions—the *generalizing*, calm, comprehensive—in a word, the *German* character of its philosophy, will insure it an enthusiastic welcome among all the nobler spirits of our land. What though its general tenor be opposed at least apparently to many of our long-cherished opinions and deeply-rooted prejudices? Shall we less welcome the truth, or glory in its advancement because of its laying bare our own individual errors? But the England of Von Raumer will be sadly and wickedly misconceived if it be really conceived as militating against a Republicanism *here*, which it opposes with absolute justice, in Great Britain, and Prussia. It will be sadly misconceived if it be regarded as embracing one single sentence with which the most bigoted lover of abstract democracy can have occasion to find fault. At the same time we cannot help believing that it will, *in some measure*, be effectual in diverting the minds of our countrymen, and of all who read it, from that per-

petual and unhealthy excitement about the forms and machinery of governmental action which have within the last century so absorbed their attention as to exclude in a strange degree all care of the proper *results* of good government—the happiness of a people—improvement in the condition of mankind—practicable under a thousand forms—and without which all forms are valueless and shadowy phantoms. It will serve also as an auxiliary in convincing mankind that the origin of the principal social evils of any given land is *not* to be found (except in a much less degree than we usually suppose) either in republicanism or monarchy or any especial method of government—that we must look for the source of our greatest defects in a variety of causes totally distinct from any such action—in love of gain, for example, whose direct tendency to social evil was vividly shown in an essay on *American Social Elevation* lately published in the "Messenger." In a word, let this book of Von Raumer's be read with attention, as a study and *as a whole*. If this thing be done—which is but too seldom done (here at least) in regard to works of a like character and cast—and we will answer for the result—as far as that result depends upon the deliberate and unprejudiced declaration of any well-educated man.

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

[Fourth edition of *Poems*, by William Cullen Bryant, reviewed in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, January, 1837. In a later review Poe says: "Mr. Longfellow is not as thorough a versifier within Mr. Bryant's limits, but a far better one upon the whole, on account of his greater range."]

The "Waterfowl" is very beautiful, but still not entitled to the admiration which it has occasionally elicited. There is a fidelity and force in the picture of the fowl as brought before the eye of the mind, and a fine sense of *effect* in throwing its figure on the background of the "crimson sky," amid "falling dew," "while glow the heavens with the last steps of day." But the merits which possibly have had most weight in the public estimation of the poem, are the melody and strength of its versification, (which is indeed excellent) and more particularly its *completeness.* Its rounded and didactic termination has done wonders:

> ....on my heart,
> Deeply hath sunk the lesson thou has given
> And shall not soon depart.
>
> He, who, from zone to zone,
> Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight
> In the long way that I must tread alone
> Will lead my steps aright.

There are, however, points of more sterling merit. We fully recognize the poet in

> Thou'rt gone—the abyss of heaven
> Hath swallowed up thy form.
>
> There is a power whose care
> Teaches thy way along that pathless coast—
> *The desert, and illimitable air—*
> Lone, wandering, but not lost.

"The Forest Hymn" consists of about a hundred and twenty blank Pentameters of whose great rhythmical beauty it is scarcely possible to speak too highly. With the exception of the line

> The solitude. Thou art in the soft winds

no fault, in this respect, can be found, while excellencies are frequent of a rare order, and evincing the greatest delicacy of ear. We might, perhaps, suggest, that the two concluding verses, beautiful as they stand, would be slightly improved by transferring to the last the metrical excess of the one immediately preceding. For the appreciation of this, it is necessary to quote six or seven lines in succession.

> Oh, from these sterner aspects of thy face
> Spare me and mine, nor let us need the wrath
> Of the mad unchained elements, to teach
> Who rules them. Be it ours to meditate
> In these calm shades thy milder majesty,
> *And to the beautiful order of thy works*
> *Learn to conform the order of our lives.*

There is an excess of one syllable in the first of the lines italicized. If we discard this syllable here, and adopt it in the final line, the close will acquire strength, we think, in acquiring a fuller volume.

> Be it ours to meditate
> In these calm shades thy milder majesty,
> And to the perfect order of thy works
> Conform, if we can, the order of our lives.

Directness, boldness, and simplicity of expression, are main features in the poem.

> Oh God! when thou
> Dost *scare* the world with tempests, set on fire
> The heavens with falling thunderbolts, or fill
> With all the waters of the firmament
> The swift dark whirlwind that uproots *the* woods,
> And drowns *the* villages.

Here an ordinary writer would have preferred the word *fright* to *scare,* and omitted the definite article before *woods* and *villages.*

"To the Evening Wind" has been justly admired. It is the best specimen of that *completeness* which we have before spoken of as a characteristic feature in the poems of Mr. Bryant. It has a beginning, middle, and end, each depending upon the other, and each beautiful. Here are three lines breathing all the spirit of Shelley.

> Pleasant shall be thy way, *where meekly bows*
> *The shutting flower, and darkling waters pass,*
> *And 'twixt the o'ershadowing branches and the grass.*

The conclusion is admirable—

> Go—but the circle of eternal change,
> Which is the life of Nature, shall restore,
> With sounds and scents from all thy mighty range,
> Thee to thy birth-place of the deep once more;
> *Sweet odors in the sea air, sweet and strange,*
> *Shall tell the home-sick mariner of the shore,*
> *And, listening to thy murmur, he shall deem*
> *He hears the rustling leaf and running stream.*

"Thanatopsis" is somewhat more than half the length of "The Forest Hymn," and of a character precisely similar. It is, however, the finer poem. Like "The Waterfowl," it owes much to the point, force, and general beauty of its didactic conclusion. In the commencement, the lines

> To him who, *in the love of nature*, holds
> Communion with her visible forms, &c.

belong to a class of vague phrases, which, since the days of Byron, have obtained too universal a currency. The verse

> Go forth under the open sky and list—

is sadly out of place amid the forcible and even Miltonic rhythm of such lines as

Take the wings
Of morning, and the Barcan desert pierce,
Or lose thyself in the continuous woods
Where rolls the Oregon.

But these are trivial faults indeed and the poem embodies a great degree of the most elevated beauty. Two of its passages, passages of the purest ideality, would alone render it worthy of the general commendation it has received.

So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan that moves
To that mysterious realm where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not, like the quarry slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon; but, sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

The hills
Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun—the vales
Stretching in pensive quietude between—
The venerable woods—rivers that move
In majesty, and the complaining brooks
That make the meadows green—and, poured round all,
Old Ocean's gray and melancholy waste—
Are but the solemn decorations all
Of the great tomb of man.

"Oh, fairest of the Rural Maids!" is a gem, of which we cannot sufficiently express our admiration. We quote in full.

Oh, fairest of the rural maids!
Thy birth was in the forest shades;
Green boughs and glimpses of the sky
Were all that met thine infant eye.

Thy sports, thy wanderings when a child
Were ever in the sylvan wild;
And all the beauty of the place
Is in thy heart and on thy face.

The twilight of the trees and rocks
Is in the light shade of thy locks,
Thy step is as the wind that weaves
Its playful way among the leaves.

Thine eyes are springs, in whose serene
And silent waters Heaven is seen;
Their lashes are the herbs that look
On their young figures in the brook.

The forest depths by foot impressed
Are not more sinless than thy breast;
The holy peace that fills the air
Of those calm solitudes, is there.

A rich simplicity is a main feature in this poem—simplicity of design and execution. This is strikingly perceptible in the opening and concluding lines, and in *expression* throughout. But there is a far higher and more strictly *ideal* beauty, which it is less easy to analyze. The original conception is of the very loftiest order of true Poesy. A maiden is born in the forest—

Green boughs and glimpses of the sky
Are all which meet her infant eye—

She is not merely *modelled in character* by the association of her childhood—this were the thought of an ordinary poet—an idea that we meet with every day in rhyme—but she imbibes, in her physical as well as moral being, the traits, the very features of the delicious scenery around her—*its loveliness becomes a portion of her own—*

The twilight of the trees and rocks
Is in the light shade of her locks,
And all the beauty of the place
Is in her heart and on her face.

It would have been a highly poetical idea to imagine the tints in the locks of the maiden deducing *a resem-*

blance to the "twilight of the trees and rocks," from the constancy of her associations—but the spirit of Ideality is immeasurably more apparent when the "twilight" is represented as becoming *identified* with the shadows of her hair.

> The twilight of the trees and rocks
> *Is in* the light shade of her locks,
> And all the beauty of the place
> *Is in* her heart and on her face.

Feeling thus, we did not, in copying the poem, italicize the lines, although beautiful,

> Thy step is *as* the wind that weaves
> Its playful way among the leaves,

nor those which immediately follow. The two concluding verses, however, are again of the most elevated species of poetical merit.

> The forest depths by foot impressed
> Are not more sinless than thy breast—
> The holy peace that fills the air
> Of those calm solitudes, *is there.*

The image contained in the lines

> Thine eyes are springs in whose serene
> And silent waters Heaven is seen—

is one which, we think, for appropriateness, completeness, and every perfect beauty of which imagery is susceptible, has never been surpassed—but *imagery* is susceptible of *no* beauty like that we have designated in the sentences above. The latter idea, moreover, is not original with our poet.

In all the rhapsodies of Mr. Bryant, which have reference to the beauty or the majesty of nature, is a most audible and thrilling tone of love and exultation.

As far as he appreciates her loveliness or her augustness, no appreciation can be more ardent, more full of heart, more replete with the glowing soul of adoration. Nor, either in the moral or physical universe coming within the periphery of his vision, does he at any time fail to perceive and designate, at once, the legitimate items of the beautiful. Therefore, could we consider (as some have considered) the mere enjoyment of the beautiful when perceived, or even this enjoyment when combined with the readiest and truest perception and discrimination in regard to beauty presented, as a sufficient test of the poetical sentiment, we could have no hesitation in according to Mr. Bryant the very highest poetical rank. But something more, we have elsewhere presumed to say, is demanded. Just above, we spoke of "objects in the moral or physical universe coming within the periphery of his vision." We now mean to say, that the relative extent of these peripheries of poetical vision must ever be a primary consideration in our classification of poets. Judging Mr. B. in this manner, and by a *general* estimate of the volume before us, we should, of course, pause long before assigning him a place with the spiritual Shelleys, or Coleridges, or Wordsworths, or with Keats, or even Tennyson, or Wilson, or with some other burning lights of our own day, to be valued in a day to come. Yet if his poems, as a whole, will not warrant us in assigning him this grade, one such poem as the last upon which we have commented, is enough to assure us that he may attain it.

The writings of our author, as we find them *here*, are characterized by an air of calm and elevated contemplation more than by any other individual feature.

In their mere didactics, however, they err essentially and primitively, inasmuch as such things are the province rather of Minerva than of the Camenæ. Of imagination, we discover much—but more of its rich and certain evidences, than of its ripened fruit. In all the minor merits Mr. Bryant is pre-eminent. His *ars celare artem* is most efficient. Of his "completeness," unity, and finish of style we have already spoken. As a versifier, we know of no writer, living or dead, who can be said greatly to surpass him. A Frenchman would assuredly call him *"un poëte des plus correctes."*

Between Cowper and Young, perhaps, (with both of whom he has many points of analogy,) would be the post assigned him by an examination at once general and superficial. Even in this view, however, he has a juster appreciation of the beautiful than the one, of the sublime than the other—a finer taste than Cowper—an equally vigorous, and far more delicate imagination than Young. In regard to his proper rank among American poets there should be no question whatever. Few—at least few who are fairly before the public, have more than very shallow claims to a rivalry with the author of "Thanatopsis."

INDEFINITIVENESS IN SONG

[*National Melodies of America,* by George P. Morris, reviewed in *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, December, 1839. Poe came later to consider "indefinitiveness" an essential of poetry whether wedded to song or not. Of Tennyson he writes in 1844: "There are passages in his works which rivet a conviction I had long entertained, that the *indefinite* is an element

in the true ποίησις.....If the author did not deliberately propose to himself [in the *Lady of Shalott*] a suggestive indefinitiveness of meaning, with the view of bringing about a definitiveness of vague and therefore of spiritual *effect*—this, at least, arose from the silent analytical promptings of that poetic genius which, in its supreme development, embodies all orders of intellectual capacity."]

There are few cases in which mere popularity should be considered a proper test of merit; but the case of song-writing is, I think, one of the few. In speaking of song-writing, I mean, of course, the composition of brief poems with an eye to their adaptation for music in the vulgar sense. In this ultimate destination of the song proper, lies its essence—its genius. It is the strict reference to music—it is the dependence upon modulated expression—which gives to this branch of letters a character altogether *unique*, and separates it, in great measure and in a manner not sufficiently considered, from ordinary literature; rendering it independent of merely ordinary proprieties; allowing it, and in fact demanding for it, a wide latitude of Law; absolutely insisting upon a certain wild license and *indefinitiveness*—an indefinitiveness recognized by every musician who is not a mere fiddler, as an important point in the philosophy of his science—as the soul, indeed, of the sensations derivable from its practice—sensations which bewilder while they enthrall—and which would *not* so enthrall if they did not so bewilder.

The sentiments deducible from the conception of sweet sound simply are out of the reach of analysis—

although referable, possibly, in their last result, to that merely mathematical recognition of *equality* which seems to be *the root of all Beauty*. Our impressions of harmony and melody in conjunction are more readily analyzed; but one thing is certain—that the *sentimental* pleasure derivable from music, is nearly in the ratio of its indefinitiveness. Give to music any undue *decision*—imbue it with any very *determinate* tone—and you deprive it, at once, of its ethereal, its ideal, and, I sincerely believe, of its intrinsic and essential character. You dispel its dream-like luxury:—you dissolve the atmosphere of the mystic in which its whole nature is bound up:—you exhaust it of its breath of faery. It then becomes a tangible and easily appreciable thing—a conception of the earth, earthy. It will not, to be sure, lose *all* its power to please, but all that I consider the *distinctiveness* of that power. And to the *over*-cultivated talent, or to the unimaginative apprehension, this deprivation of its most delicate *nære* will be, not unfrequently, a recommendation. A *determinateness* of expression is sought—and sometimes by composers who should know better—is sought as a beauty, rather than rejected as a blemish. Thus we have, even from high authorities, attempts at absolute *imitation* in musical sounds. Who can forget, or cease to regret, the many errors of this kind into which some great minds have fallen, simply through over-estimating the triumphs of *skill*. Who can help lamenting the Battle of Prague? What man of taste is not ready to laugh, or to weep, over their "guns, drums, trumpets, blunderbusses and thunder?" "Vocal music," says L'Abbate Gravina, "ought to imitate the natural language of the human feelings and

passions, rather than the warbling of Canary birds, which our singers, now-a-days, affect so vastly to mimic with their quaverings and boasted cadences." This is true only so far as the "rather" is concerned. If *any* music must imitate *anything*, it were, undoubtedly, better that the imitation should be limited as Gravina suggests.

That *indefinitiveness* which is, at least, *one* of the essentials of true music, must, of course, be kept in view by the song-writer; while, by the critic, it should always be considered in his estimate of the *song*. It is, in the author, a consciousness—sometimes merely an instinctive appreciation, of this necessity for the indefinite, which imparts to all songs, richly conceived, that free, affluent, and *hearty* manner, little scrupulous about niceties of phrase, which cannot be better expressed than by the hackneyed French word *abandonnement*, and which is so strikingly exemplified in both the serious and joyous ballads and carols of our old English progenitors. Wherever verse has been found most strictly married to music, this feature prevails. It is thus the essence of all antique song. It is the soul of Homer. It is the spirit of Anacreon. It is even the genius of Æschylus. Coming down to our own times, it is the vital principle in De Béranger. Wanting this quality, no song-writer was ever truly popular, and, for the reasons assigned, no song-writer need ever expect to be so.

These views properly understood, it will be seen how baseless are the ordinary objections to songs proper, on the score of "conceit" (to use Johnson's word), or of hyperbole, or on various other grounds tenable enough in respect to poetry not designed for

music. The "conceit," for example, which some envious rivals of Morris have so much objected to—

> Her heart and morning broke together
> In the storm—

this "conceit" is merely in keeping with the essential spirit of the song proper. To all reasonable persons it will be sufficient to say that the fervid, hearty, free-spoken songs of Cowley and of Donne—more especially of Cunningham, of Harrington, and of Carew—abound in precisely similar things; and that they are to be met with, plentifully, in the polished pages of Moore and of Béranger, who introduce them with thought and retain them after mature deliberation.

Morris is, very decidedly, our best writer of songs —and, in saying this, I mean to assign him a high rank as *poet*. For my own part, I would much rather have written the best *song* of a nation than its noblest *epic*.

FANCY AND IMAGINATION

[*Alciphron*, by Thomas Moore, reviewed in *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, January, 1840. Compare the review of *The Culprit Fay*, pages 82-93. The subject is discussed in chapter XIII of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* and in the latter half of Wordsworth's *Preface* of 1815. Poe further elaborates the theme in *The Broadway Journal*, January 18, 1845. "The fact seems to be," he says, "that Imagination, Fancy, Fantasy, and Humor have in common the elements Combination and Novelty. The Imagination is the artist of the four."]

A new poem from Moore calls to mind that critical opinion respecting him which had its origin, we be-

lieve, in the dogmatism of Coleridge—we mean the opinion that he is essentially the poet of *fancy*—the term being employed in contradistinction to *imagination*. "The fancy," says the author of the "Auncient Mariner," in his "Biographia Literaria," "the fancy combines, the imagination creates." And this was intended, and has been received, as a distinction. If so at all, it is one without a difference; without even a difference of *degree*. The fancy as nearly creates as the imagination; and neither creates in any respect. All novel conceptions are merely unusual combinations. The mind of man can *imagine* nothing which has not really existed; and this point is susceptible of the most positive demonstration—see the Baron de Bielfeld, in his "Premiers Traits de L'Erudition Universelle," 1767. It will be said, perhaps, that we can imagine a *griffin*, and that a griffin does not exist. Not the griffin certainly, but its component parts. It is a mere compendium of known limbs and features—of known qualities. Thus with all which seems to be *new*—which appears to be a *creation* of intellect. It is resoluble into the old. The wildest and most vigorous effort of mind cannot stand the test of this analysis.

We might make a distinction, *of degree*, between the fancy and the imagination, in saying that the latter is the former *loftily employed*. But experience proves this distinction to be unsatisfactory. What we *feel* and *know* to be fancy, will be found still only *fanciful*, whatever be the theme which engages it. It retains its idiosyncrasy under all circumstances. No *subject* exalts it into the ideal. We might exemplify this by reference to the writings of one whom our patriotism, rather than our judgment, has elevated to a niche in

the Poetic Temple which he does not becomingly fill, and which he cannot long uninterruptedly hold. We allude to the late Dr. Rodman Drake, whose puerile abortion, "The Culprit Fay," we examined, at some length, in a *critique* elsewhere; proving it, we think, beyond all question, to belong to that class of the pseudo-ideal, in dealing with which we find ourselves embarrassed between a kind of half-consciousness that we ought to admire, and the certainty that we do not. Dr. Drake was employed upon a good subject—at least it is a subject precisely identical with those which Shakespeare was wont so happily to treat, and in which, especially, the author of "Lilian" has so wonderfully succeeded. But the American has brought to his task a mere *fancy*, and has grossly failed in doing what many suppose him to have done—in writing an ideal or imaginative poem. There is not one particle of the true ποίησις about "The Culprit Fay." We say that the subject, even at its best points, did not aid Dr. Drake in the slightest degree. He was never more than *fanciful*.....

The truth is that the just distinction between the fancy and the imagination (and which is still but a distinction *of degree*) is involved in the consideration of the *mystic*. We give this as an idea of our own, altogether. We have no authority for our opinion—but do not the less firmly hold it. The term *mystic* is here employed in the sense of Augustus William Schlegel, and of most other German critics. It is applied by them to that class of composition in which there lies beneath the transparent upper current of meaning, an under or *suggestive* one. What we vaguely term the *moral* of any sentiment is its mystic

or secondary expression. It has the vast force of an accompaniment in music. This vivifies the air; that spiritualizes the *fanciful* conception, and lifts it into the *ideal.*

This theory will bear, we think, the most rigorous tests which can be made applicable to it, and will be acknowledged as tenable by all who are themselves imaginative. If we carefully examine those poems, or portions of poems, or those prose romances, which mankind have been accustomed to designate as *imaginative,* (for an instinctive feeling leads us to employ properly the term whose full import we have still never been able to define,) it will be seen that all so designated are remarkable for the *suggestive* character which we have discussed. They are strongly *mystic*—in the proper sense of the word. We will here only call to the reader's mind the "Prometheus Vinctus" of Æschylus; the "Inferno" of Dante; the "Destruction of Numantia" by Cervantes; the "Comus" of Milton; the "Auncient Mariner," the "Christabel," and the "Kubla Khan" of Coleridge; the "Nightingale" of Keats; and, most especially, the "Sensitive Plant" of Shelley, and the "Undine" of De La Motte Fouqué. These two latter poems (for we call them both such) are the finest possible examples of the purely *ideal.* There is little of fancy here, and everything of imagination. With each note of the lyre is heard a ghostly, and not always a distinct, but an august and soul-exalting *echo.* In every glimpse of beauty presented, we catch, through long and wild vistas, dim bewildering visions of a far more ethereal beauty *beyond.* But not so in poems which the world has always persisted in terming *fanciful.* Here the upper current is often

exceedingly brilliant and beautiful; but then men *feel* that this upper current *is all*. No Naiad voice addresses them *from below*. The notes of the air of the song do not tremble with the according tones of the accompaniment.

It is the failure to perceive these truths which has occasioned that embarrassment which our critics experience while discussing the topic of Moore's station in the poetic world—that hesitation with which we are obliged to refuse him the loftiest rank among the most noble. The popular voice, and the popular heart, have denied him that happiest quality, imagination—and here the popular voice (*because* for once it has gone with the popular heart) is right, but yet only relatively so. Imagination is not the leading feature of the poetry of Moore; but he possesses it in no little degree.

We will quote a few instances from the poem now before us—instances which will serve to exemplify the distinctive features which we have attributed to ideality.

It is the *suggestive* force which exalts and ethereal-izes the passages we copy.

> Or is it that there lurks, indeed,
> Some truth in man's prevailing creed,
> And that our guardians from on high
> Come, in that pause from toil and sin,
> To put the senses' curtain by,
> And on the wakeful soul look in!

Again—

> The eternal pyramids of Memphis burst
> Awfully on my sight—standing sublime
> 'Twixt earth and heaven, the watch-towers of time,
> From whose lone summit, when his reign hath past,
> From earth for ever, he will look his last.

And again—

Is there for man no hope—but this which dooms
His only lasting trophies to be tombs!
But 'tis not so—earth, heaven, all nature shows
He *may* become immortal, *may* unclose
The wings within him wrapt, and proudly rise
Redeemed from earth a creature of the skies!

And here—

The pyramid shadows, stretching from the light,
Look like the first colossal steps of night,
Stalking across the valley to invade
The distant hills of prophyry with their shade!

And once more—

Their Silence, thoughtful God, who loves
The neighbourhood of Death, in groves
Of asphodel lies hid, and weaves
His hushing spell among the leaves.

Such lines as these, we must admit, however, are not of frequent occurrence in the poem—the sum of whose great beauty is composed of the several sums of a world of minor excellencies.

Moore has always been renowned for the number and appositeness, as well as novelty, of his similes; and the renown thus acquired is strongly indicial of his deficiency in that nobler merit—the noblest of them all. No poet thus distinguished was ever richly ideal. Pope and Cowper are remarkable instances in point. Similes (so much insisted upon by the critics of the reign of Queen Anne) are never, in our opinion, strictly in good taste, whatever may be said to the contrary, and certainly can never be made to accord with other high qualities, except when naturally arising from the subject in the way of illustration—and, when thus arising, they have seldom the merit of novelty.

To be novel, they must fail in essential particulars. The higher minds will avoid their frequent use. They form no portion of the ideal, and appertain to the fancy alone.

THE NATURE AND INTEREST OF PLOT

[Bulwer's *Night and Morning,* reviewed in *Graham's Magazine,* April, 1841. In his *Marginalia* (1844) and again in *Eureka* (1848), Poe calls attention to the "mutuality" or adaptation in nature, or the "reciprocity between cause and effect." He thus summarizes and applies: "The pleasure which we derive from any exertion of human ingenuity is in the direct ratio of the *approach* to this species of reciprocity between cause and effect. In the construction of *plot,* for example, in fictitious literature, we should aim at so arranging the points, or incidents, that we cannot distinctly see, in respect to any one of them, whether that one depends upon any one other, or upholds it. In this sense, of course, perfection of plot is unattainable *in fact,*—because Man is the constructor. The plots of God are perfect. The Universe is a Plot of God."]

We do not give this as the plot of "Night and Morning," but as the groundwork of the plot; which latter, woven from the incidents above mentioned, is in itself exceedingly complex. The groundwork, as will be seen, is of no original character—it is even absurdly commonplace. We are not asserting too much when we say that every second novel since the flood has turned upon some series of hopeless efforts, either to establish legitimacy, or to prove a will, or to get possession of a great sum of money most unjustly withheld, or to find a ragamuffin of a father, who had been

much better left unfound. But, saying nothing of the basis upon which this story has been erected, the story itself is, in many respects, worthy its contriver.

The word *plot*, as commonly accepted, conveys but an indefinite meaning. Most persons think of it as a simple *complexity;* and into this error even so fine a critic as Augustus William Schlegel has obviously fallen, when he confounds its idea with that of the mere *intrigue* in which the Spanish dramas of Cervantes and Calderon abound. But the greatest involution of incident will not result in plot; which, properly defined, is *that in which no part can be displaced without ruin to the whole.* It may be described as a building so dependently constructed, that to change the position of a single brick is to overthrow the entire fabric. In this definition and description, we of course refer only to that infinite perfection which the true artist bears ever in mind—that unattainable goal to which his eyes are always directed, but of the possibility of attaining which he still endeavours, if wise, to cheat himself into the belief. The reading world, however, is satisfied with a less rigid construction of the term. It is content to think that plot a good one, in which none of the *leading* incidents can be *removed* without *detriment* to the mass. Here indeed is a material difference; and in this view of the case the plot of "Night and Morning" is decidedly excellent. Speaking comparatively, and in regard to stories similarly composed, it is one of the best. This the author has evidently designed to make it. For this purpose he has taxed his powers to the utmost. Every page bears marks of excessive elaboration, all tending to one point—a perfect adaptation of the very numerous atoms of a very unusually

involute story. The better to attain his object he has resorted to the expedient of writing his book backwards. This is a simple thing in itself, but may not be generally understood. An example will best convey the idea. Drawing near the *dénouement* of his tale, our novelist had proceeded so far as to render it necessary that means should be devised for the discovery of the missing marriage record. This record is in the old bureau—this bureau is at Fernside, originally the seat of Philip's father, but now in possession of one Lord Lilburne, a member of Robert Beaufort's family. Two things now strike the writer—first, that the retrieval of the hero's fortune should be brought about by no less a personage than the heroine—by some lady who should in the end be his bride—and, secondly, that this lady must procure access to Fernside. Up to this period in the narrative, it had been the design to make Camilla Beaufort, Philip's cousin, the heroine; but in such case, the cousin and Lord Lilburne being friends, the document must have been obtained by fair means; whereas foul means are the most dramatic. There would have been no *difficulties* to overcome in introducing Camilla into the house in question. She would have merely rung the bell and walked in. Moreover, in getting the paper, she would have had no chance of getting up a scene. This lady is therefore dropped as the heroine; Mr. Bulwer retraces his steps, creates Fanny, brings Philip to love her, and employs Lilburne (a courtly villain, invented for all the *high* dirty work, as De Burgh Smith for all the *low* dirty work of the story)—employs Lilburne to abduct her to Fernside, where the capture of the document is at length (more dramatically than naturally)

contrived. In short, the latter incidents were emendations, and their really episodical character is easily traced by the critic. What appears first in the published book, was last in the original MS. Many of the most striking portions of the novel were *interleaved* in the same manner—thus giving to afterthought that air of premeditation which is so pleasing. Effect seems to follow cause in the most natural and in the most provident manner, but, in the true construction, the cause (and here we commit no bull) is absolutely brought about by effect. The many brief, and seemingly insulated chapters met with in the course of the narrative are the interposed afterthoughts in question.

. . . . . .

We have defined the word *plot* in a definition of our own to be sure, but in one which we do not the less consider substantially correct; and we have said that it has been a main point with Mr. Bulwer in his last novel, "Night and Morning," to work up his plot as near perfection as possible. We have asserted, too, that his design is well accomplished; but we do not the less assert that it has been conceived and executed in error.

The interest of plot, referring, as it does, to cultivated thought in the reader, and appealing to considerations analogous with those which are the essence of sculptural taste, is by no means a popular interest; although it has the peculiarity of being appreciated in its atoms by all, while in its totality of beauty it is comprehended but by the few. The pleasure which the many derive from it is disjointed, ineffective, and evanescent; and even in the case of the critical reader it is a pleasure which may be purchased too dearly.

A good tale may be written without it. Some of the finest fictions in the world have neglected it altogether. We see nothing of it in "Gil Blas," in the "Pilgrim's Progress," or in "Robinson Crusoe." Thus it is not an essential in story-telling at all; although, well managed, within proper limits, it is a thing to be desired. At best it is but a secondary and rigidly artistical merit, for which no merit of a higher class—no merit founded in nature—should be sacrificed. But in the book before us *much* is sacrificed for its sake, and every thing is rendered subservient to its purposes. So excessive is, here, the involution of circumstances, that it has been found impossible to dwell for more than a brief period upon any particular one. The writer seems in a perpetual hurry to accomplish what, in autorial parlance, is called "bringing up one's time." He flounders in the vain attempt to keep all his multitudinous incidents at one and the same moment before the eye. His ability has been sadly taxed in the effort—but more sadly the time and temper of the reader. No sooner do we begin to take some slight degree of interest in some cursorily-sketched event, than we are hurried off to some other, for which a new feeling is to be built up, only to be tumbled down, forthwith, as before. And thus, since there is no sufficiently continuous scene in the whole novel, it results that there is no strongly effective one. Time not being given us in which to become absorbed, we are only permitted to admire, while we are not the less chilled, tantalized, wearied, and displeased. Nature, with natural interest, has been given up a bond-maiden to an elaborate but still to a misconceived, perverted, and most unsatisfactory Art.

Very little reflection might have sufficed to convince Mr. Bulwer that narratives, even one fourth as long as the one now lying upon our table, are *essentially* inadapted to that nice and complex adjustment of incident at which he has made this desperate attempt. In the wire-drawn romances which have been so long fashionable (God only knows how or why) the pleasure we derive (if any) is a composite one, and made up of the respective sums of the various pleasurable sentiments experienced in perusal. Without excessive and fatiguing exertion, inconsistent with legitimate interest, the mind cannot comprehend at one time and in one survey the numerous individual items which go to establish the whole. Thus the high ideal sense of the *unique* is sure to be wanting; for, however absolute in itself be the unity of the novel, it must inevitably fail of appreciation. We speak now of that species of unity which is alone worth the attention of the critic—the unity or totality of *effect*.

But we could never bring ourselves to attach any idea of merit to mere *length* in the abstract. A long story does not appear to us necessarily twice as good as one only half so long. The ordinary talk about "continuous and sustained effort" is pure twaddle and nothing more. Perseverance is one thing and genius is another,—whatever Buffon or Hogarth may assert to the contrary,—and notwithstanding that, in many passages of the dogmatical literature of old Rome, such phrases as *"diligentia maxima," "diligentia mirabilis"* can be construed only as "great talent" or "wonderful ability." Now if the author of "Ernest Maltravers," implicitly following authority like *les moutons de Panurge, will* persist in writing long ro-

mances, because long romances have been written before,—if, in short, he cannot be satisfied with the brief tale (a species of composition which admits of the highest development of artistical power in alliance with the wildest vigour of imagination),—he must then content himself, perforce, with a more simply and more rigidly narrative form.

And here, could he see these comments upon a work which (estimating it, as is the wont of all artists of his calibre, by the labour which it has cost him) he considers his *chef d'œuvre*, he would assure us, with a smile, that it is precisely because the book is *not* narrative and *is* dramatic that he holds it in so lofty an esteem. Now in regard to its being dramatic, we should reply that, so far as the radical and ineradicable *deficiencies* of the drama go, it is. This continual and vexatious shifting of scene, with a view of bringing up events to the time being, originated at a period when books were not; and in fact, had the drama not preceded books, it might never have succeeded them—we might, and probably should, never have had a drama at all. By the frequent "bringing up" of his events the dramatist strove to supply, as well as he could, the want of the combining, arranging, and especially of the *commenting* power, now in possession of the narrative author. No doubt it was a deep but vague sense of this want which brought into birth the Greek chorus—a thing altogether apart from the drama itself, *never* upon the stage—and representing or personifying the expression of the sympathy of the audience in the matters transacted.

In brief, while the drama of colloquy, vivacious and breathing of life, is well adapted to narration, the

drama of action and passion will always prove, when employed beyond due limits, a source of embarrassment to the narrator, and it can afford him, at best, nothing which he does not already possess in full force. We have spoken upon this head much at length; for we remember that, in some preface to one of his previous novels (some preface in which he endeavoured to pre-reason and pre-coax us into admiration of what was to follow—a bad practice), Mr. Bulwer was at great pains to insist upon the peculiar merits of what he even then termed the dramatic conduct of his story. The simple truth was that, then, as now, he had merely concentrated into his book all the *necessary evils* of the stage.

Giving up his attention to the one point upon which we have commented, our novelist has failed to do himself justice in others. The overstrained effort at perfection of plot has seduced him into absurd sacrifices of verisimilitude, as regards the connexion of his *dramatis personæ* each with each and each with the main events. However incidental be the appearance of any personage upon the stage, this personage is sure to be linked in, will I nill I, with the matters in hand. Philip, on the stage coach, for example, converses with but one individual, William Gawtrey; yet this man's fate (not subsequently but previously) is interwoven into that of Philip himself, through the latter's relationship to Lilburne. The hero goes to his mother's grave, and there comes into contact with this Gawtrey's father. He meets Fanny, and Fanny happens to be also involved in his destiny (a pet word, conveying a pet idea of the author's) through *her* relationship to Lilburne. The witness in the case of his mother's

marriage is missing, and this individual turns up at last in the brother of that very Charles De Burgh Smith, with whom so perfectly accidental an intimacy has already been established. The wronged heir proceeds at random to look for a lawyer, and stumbles at once upon the precise one who had figured before in the story, and who knows all about previous investigations. Setting out in search of Liancourt, the first person he sees is that gentleman himself. Entering a horse-bazaar in a remote portion of the country, the steed up for sale at the exact moment of his entrance is recognized as the pet of his better days. Now our quarrel with these coincidences is not that they sometimes, but that they everlastingly, occur, and that nothing occurs besides. We find no fault with Philip for chancing, at the identically proper moment, upon the identical men, women, and horses necessary for his own ends and the ends of the story, but we do think it excessively hard that he should *never happen upon any thing else.*

DEFECTS IN THE TECHNIQUE OF BARNABY RUDGE

[*Barnaby Rudge,* by Charles Dickens, reviewed in *Graham's Magazine,* February, 1842. If this penetrating review is not creative criticism, it is re-creative in a unique sense. In all that pertains to plot, to structure, to suspense, to the masterly handling of convergent details, Poe shows here a genius far beyond that of Dickens. Sir Robertson Nicoll, in *The Problem of Edwin Drood,* doubts whether Poe or any one else wrote for *The Saturday Evening Post,* of Philadelphia, May 1, 1841, the "prospective notice" of *Barnaby Rudge*

which Poe here quotes twice. "If Poe wrote that article," so runs the indictment, "he wrote it after having read the fifth chapter of Dickens's novel." The prospective notice, however, has since been discovered and Poe's self-quotations are accurate, I find, to the minutest detail. But of course he had read the fifth chapter. When he says that "the secret" was discovered as soon as he had read Solomon Daisy's story—that is, chapter one—he means the secret of the real murderer, not the secret of the blood-smeared wrist which is mentioned for the first time in chapter five. And when Poe adds that he wrote his prospective notice after the novel had been "only begun," he does not mean that this beginning stopped with chapter one. In fact the prospective notice proves to be a notice of "Nos. 1, 2, and 3" of the 19 numbers or parts that were to contain the entire novel. Number 1 is known to have contained the first three chapters. Is it conceivable that numbers 2 and 3 stopped short of chapter five? Poe did not attempt to deceive anybody. Dickens is said to have expressed astonishment at the detective ability shown in the prospective notice, but the prospective notice is not equal to the retrospective notice that follows. You will observe, by the way, that the next to the last paragraph of our extract contains the egg from which three years later was hatched *The Raven*.]

We have given, as may well be supposed, but a very meagre outline of the story, and we have given it in the simple or natural sequence. That is to say, we have related the events, as nearly as might be, in the order of their occurrence. But this order would by

no means have suited the purpose of the novelist, whose design has been to maintain the secret of the murder, and the consequent mystery which encircles Rudge, and the actions of his wife, until the catastrophe of his discovery by Haredale. The *thesis* of the novel may thus be regarded as based upon curiosity. Every point is so arranged as to perplex the reader, and whet his desire for elucidation:—for example, the first appearance of Rudge at the Maypole; his questions; his persecution of Mrs. R.; the ghost seen by the frequenter of the Maypole; and Haredale's impressive conduct in consequence. What *we* have told, in the very beginning of our digest, in regard to the shifting of the gardener's dress, is sedulously kept from the reader's knowledge until he learns it from Rudge's own confession in jail. We say seduluously; for, *the intention once known, the traces* of the design can be found upon every page. There is an amusing and exceedingly ingenious instance at page 145, where Solomon Daisy describes his adventure with the ghost.

"'It was a ghost—a spirit,' cried Daisy.

"'Whose?' they all three asked together.

"In the excess of his emotion (for he fell back trembling in his chair, and waved his hand as if entreating them to question him no farther) *his answer was lost upon all* but old John Willet, who happened to be seated close beside him.

"'Who!' cried Parkes and Tom Cob—'Who was it?'

"'Gentlemen,' said Mr. Willet, after a long pause, 'you needn't ask. The likeness of a murdered man. This is the nineteenth of March.'

"A profound silence ensued."

The impression here skilfully conveyed is, that the ghost seen is that of Reuben Haredale; and the mind of the not-too-acute reader is at once averted from the true state of the case—from the murderer, Rudge, living in the body.

Now there can be no question that, by such means as these, many points which are comparatively insipid in the natural sequence of our digest, and which would have been comparatively insipid even if given in full detail in a natural sequence, are endued with the interest of mystery; but neither can it be denied that a vast many more points are at the same time deprived of all effect, and become null, through the impossibility of comprehending them without the key. The author, who, cognizant of his plot, writes with this cognizance continually operating upon him, and thus *writes to himself* in spite of himself, does not, of course, feel that much of what is effective to his own informed perception, must necessarily be lost upon his uninformed readers; and he himself is never in condition, as regards his own work, to bring the matter to test. But the reader may easily satisfy himself of the validity of our objection. Let him *re-peruse* "Barnaby Rudge," and with a pre-comprehension of the mystery, these points of which we speak break out in all directions like stars, and throw quadruple brilliance over the narrative—a brilliance which a correct taste will at once declare unprofitably sacrificed at the shrine of the keenest interest of mere mystery.

The design of *mystery*, however, being once determined upon by an author, it becomes imperative, first, that no undue or inartistical means be employed to conceal the secret of the plot; and, secondly, that the

secret be well kept. Now, when, at page 16, we read that "the body of *poor Mr. Rudge, the steward, was found*" months after the outrage, etc., we see that Mr. Dickens has been guilty of no misdemeanour against Art in stating what was not the fact; since the falsehood is put into the mouth of Solomon Daisy, and given merely as the impression of this individual and of the public. The writer has not asserted it in his own person, but ingeniously conveyed an idea (false in itself, yet a belief in which is necessary for the effect of the tale) by the mouth of one of his characters. The case is different, however, when Mrs. Rudge is repeatedly denominated "the widow." It is the author who, himself, frequently so terms her. This is disingenuous and inartistical: accidentally so, of course. We speak of the matter merely by way of illustrating our point, and as an oversight on the part of Mr. Dickens.

That the secret be well kept is obviously necessary. A failure to preserve it until the proper moment of *dénouement*, throws all into confusion, so far as regards the *effect* intended. If the mystery leak out, against the author's will, his purposes are immediately at odds and ends; for he proceeds upon the supposition that certain impressions *do* exist, which do *not* exist, in the mind of his readers. We are not prepared to say, so positively as we could wish, whether, by the public at large, the whole *mystery* of the murder committed by Rudge, with the identity of the Maypole ruffian with Rudge himself, was fathomed at any period previous to the period intended, or, if so, whether at a period so early as materially to interfere with the interest designed; but we are forced, through sheer modesty, to

suppose this the case; since, by ourselves individually, the secret was distinctly understood immediately upon the perusal of the story of Solomon Daisy, which occurs at the seventh page of this volume of three hundred and twenty-three. In the number of the "Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post," for May the 1st, 1841, (the tale having then only begun) will be found a *prospective notice* of some length, in which we made use of the following words:

"That Barnaby is the son of the murderer may not appear evident to our readers—but we will explain. The person murdered is Mr. Reuben Haredale. He was found assassinated in his bed-chamber. His steward (Mr. Rudge, senior) and his gardener (name not mentioned) are missing. At first both are suspected. 'Some months afterward'—here we use the words of the story—'the steward's body, scarcely to be recognised but by his clothes, and the watch and ring he wore—was found at the bottom of a piece of water in the grounds, with a deep gash in the breast where he had been stabbed by a knife. He was only partly dressed; and all people agreed that he had been sitting up reading in his own room, where there were many traces of blood, and was suddenly fallen upon and killed, before his master.'

"Now, be it observed, it is not the author himself who asserts that the *steward's body was found;* he has put the words in the mouth of one of his characters. His design is to make it appear, in the *dénouement,* that the steward, Rudge, first murdered the gardener, then went to his master's chamber, murdered *him,* was interrupted by his (Rudge's) wife, whom he seized

and held *by the wrist*, to prevent her giving the alarm —that he then, after possessing himself of the booty desired, returned to the gardener's room, exchanged clothes with him, put upon the corpse his own watch and ring, and secreted it where it was afterwards discovered at so late a period that the features could not be identified."

The differences between our pre-conceived ideas, as here stated, and the actual facts of the story, will be found immaterial. The gardener was murdered, not before but after his master; and that Rudge's wife seized *him* by the wrist, instead of his seizing *her*, has so much the air of a mistake on the part of Mr. Dickens, that we can scarcely speak of our own version as erroneous. The grasp of a murderer's bloody hand on the wrist of a woman *enceinte*, would have been more likely to produce the effect described (and this every one will allow) than the grasp of the hand of the woman, upon the wrist of the assassin. We may therefore say of our supposition as Talleyrand said of some cockney's bad French—*que s'il n'est pas Français, assurément donc il le doit être*—that if we did not rightly prophesy, yet, at least, our prophecy *should have been right.*

We are informed in the Preface to "Barnaby Rudge" that "no account of the Gordon Riots having been introduced into any work of fiction, and the subject presenting very extraordinary and remarkable features," our author "was led to project this tale." But for this distinct announcement (for Mr. Dickens can scarcely have deceived himself) we should have looked upon the Riots as altogether an afterthought.

It is evident that they have no necessary connexion with the story. In our digest, which carefully includes all *essentials* of the plot, we have dismissed the doings of the mob in a paragraph. The whole event of the drama would have proceeded as well without as with them. They have even the appearance of being *forcibly* introduced. In our compendium above, it will be seen that we emphasized several allusions to an interval of *five years*. The action is brought up to a certain point. The train of events is, so far, uninterrupted—nor is there any apparent need of interruption—yet all the characters are now thrown forward for a period of five years. And why? We ask in vain. It is not to bestow upon the lovers a more decorous maturity of age—for this is the only possible idea which suggests itself—Edward Chester is already eight-and-twenty, and Emma Haredale would, in America at least, be upon the list of old maids. No—there is no such reason; nor does there appear to be any one more plausible than that, as it is now the year of our Lord 1775, an advance of five years, will bring the *dramatis personæ* up to a very remarkable period, affording an admirable opportunity for their display—the period, in short, of the "No Popery" riots. This was the idea with which we were forcibly impressed in perusal, and which nothing less than Mr. Dickens' positive assurance to the contrary would have been sufficient to eradicate.

It is, perhaps, but one of a thousand instances of the disadvantages, both to the author and the public, of the present absurd fashion of periodical novel-writing, that our author had not sufficiently considered or determined upon *any* particular plot when he began the

story now under review. In fact, we see, or fancy that we see, numerous traces of indecision—traces which a dexterous supervision of the complete work might have enabled him to erase. We have already spoken of the intermission of a lustrum. The opening speeches of old Chester are by far too *truly* gentlemanly for his subsequent character. The wife of Varden, also, is too wholesale a shrew to be converted into the quiet wife—the original design was to punish her. At page 16, we read thus—Solomon Daisy is telling his story:

"'I put as good a face upon it as I could, and muffling myself up, started out with a lighted lantern in one hand and the key of the church in the other'—at this point of the narrative, the dress of the strange man rustled as if he had turned to hear more distinctly."

Here the design is to call the reader's attention to a *point* in the tale; but no subsequent explanation is made. Again, a few lines below—

"The houses were all shut up, and the folks in doors, and perhaps there is only one man in the world who knows how dark it really was."

Here the intention is still more evident, but there is no result. Again, at page 54, the idiot draws Mr. Chester to the window, and directs his attention to the clothes hanging upon the lines in the yard:

"'Look down,' he said softly; 'do you mark how they whisper in each other's ears, then dance and leap

to make believe they are in sport? Do you see how they stop for a moment, when they think there is no one looking, and mutter among themselves again; and then how they roll and gambol, delighted with the mischief they've been plotting? Look at 'em now! See how they whirl and plunge. And now they stop again, and whisper cautiously together—little thinking, mind, how often I have lain upon the ground and watched them. I say—what is it that they plot and hatch? Do you know?' "

Upon perusal of these ravings, we at once supposed them to have allusions to some *real* plotting; and even now we cannot force ourselves to believe them not so intended. They suggested the opinion that Haredale himself would be implicated in the murder, and that the counsellings alluded to might be those of that gentleman with Rudge. It is by no means impossible that some such conception wavered in the mind of the author. At page 32 we have a confirmation of our idea, when Varden endeavours to arrest the murderer in the house of his wife—

" 'Come back—come back!' exclaimed the woman, wrestling with and clasping him. 'Do not touch him on your life. *He carries other lives besides his own.*' "

The *dénouement* fails to account for this exclamation.

In the beginning of the story much emphasis is placed upon the *two* female servants of Haredale, and upon his journey to and from London, as well as upon his wife. We have merely said, in our digest, that he

was a widower, italicizing the remark. All these other points are, in fact, singularly irrelevant, in the supposition that the original design has not undergone modification.

Again, at page 57, when Haredale talks of "his dismantled and beggared hearth," we cannot help fancying that the author had in view some different wrong, or series of wrongs, perpetrated by Chester, than any which appear in the end. This gentleman, too, takes extreme and frequent pains to acquire dominion over the rough Hugh—this matter is particularly insisted upon by the novelist—we look, of course, for some important result—but the filching of a letter is nearly all that is accomplished. That Barnaby's delight in the desperate scenes of the rebellion, is inconsistent with his horror of blood, will strike every reader; and this inconsistency seems to be the consequence of the *afterthought* upon which we have already commented. In fact the title of the work, the elaborate and pointed manner of the commencement, the impressive description of The Warren, and especially of Mrs. Rudge, go far to show that Mr. Dickens has really deceived himself—that the soul of the plot, as originally conceived, was the murder of Haredale, with the subsequent discovery of the murderer in Rudge—but that this idea was afterwards abandoned, or rather suffered to be merged in that of the Popish Riots. The result has been most unfavourable. That which, of itself, would have proved highly effective, has been rendered nearly null by its situation. In the multitudinous outrage and horror of the Rebellion, the *one* atrocity is utterly whelmed and extinguished.

The reasons of this deflection from the first pur-

pose appear to us self-evident. One of them we have already mentioned. The other is that our author discovered, when too late, that *he had anticipated, and thus rendered valueless, his chief effect.* This will be readily understood. The particulars of the assassination being withheld, the strength of the narrator is put forth, in the beginning of the story, to *whet curiosity* in respect to these particulars; and, so far, he is but in proper pursuance of his main design. But from this intention he unwittingly passes into the error of *exaggerating anticipation.* And error though it be, it is an error wrought with consummate skill. What, for example, could more vividly enhance our impression of the unknown horror enacted, than the deep and enduring gloom of Haredale—than the Pilot's inborn awe of blood—or, especially, than the expression of countenance so imaginatively attributed to Mrs. Rudge—"the capacity for expressing terror—something only dimly seen, but never absent for a moment—the shadow of some look to which an instant of intense and most unutterable horror only could have given rise"? But it is a condition of the human fancy that the promises of such words are irredeemable. In the notice before mentioned we thus spoke upon this topic:—

"This is a conception admirably adapted to whet curiosity in respect to the character of that event which is hinted at as forming the basis of the story. But this observation should not fail to be made—that the anticipation must surpass the reality; that no matter how terrific be the circumstances which, in the *dénouement* shall appear to have occasioned the expression of

countenance worn habitually by Mrs. Rudge, still they will not be able to satisfy the mind of the reader. He will surely be disappointed. The skilful intimation of horror held out by the artist, produces an effect which will deprive his conclusion of all. These intimations —these dark hints of some uncertain evil—are often rhetorically praised as effective—but are only justly so praised where there is *no dénouement* whatever—where the reader's imagination is left to clear up the mystery for itself—and this is not the design of Mr. Dickens."

And, in fact, our author was not long in seeing his precipitancy. He had placed himself in a dilemma from which even his high genius could not extricate him. He at once shifts the main interest—and in truth we do not see what better he could have done. The reader's attention becomes absorbed in the riots, and he fails to observe that what should have been the true catastrophe of the novel, is exceedingly feeble and ineffective.

A few cursory remarks:—Mr. Dickens fails peculiarly in *pure* narration. See, for example, page 296, where the connexion of Hugh and Chester is detailed by Varden. See also in "The Curiosity Shop," where, when the result is fully known, so many words are occupied in explaining the relationship of the brothers.

The effect of the present narrative might have been materially increased by confining the action within the limits of London. The "Notre Dame" of Hugo affords a fine example of the force which can be gained by concentration, or unity of place. The unity of time

is also sadly neglected, to no purpose, in "Barnaby Rudge."

That Rudge should so long and so deeply feel the sting of conscience is inconsistent with his brutality.

On page 15, the interval elapsing between the murder and Rudge's return, is variously stated at twenty-two and twenty-four years. It may be asked why the inmates of The Warren failed to hear the alarm-bell which was heard by Solomon Daisy.

The idea of persecution by being tracked, as by bloodhounds, from one spot of quietude to another, is a favourite one with Mr. Dickens. Its effect cannot be denied.

The stain upon Barnaby's wrist, caused by fright in the mother at so late a period of gestation as one day before mature parturition, is shockingly at war with all medical experience.

When Rudge, escaped from prison, unshackled, with money at command, is in agony at his wife's refusal to perjure herself for his salvation—is it not *queer* that he should demand any other salvation than lay in his heels?

Some of the conclusions of chapters—see pages 40 and 100—seem to have been written for the mere purpose of illustrating tail-pieces.

The leading idiosyncrasy of Mr. Dickens' remarkable humour, is to be found in his *translating the language of gesture, or action, or tone.* For example—

"The cronies nodded to each other, and Mr. Parkes remarked in an undertone, shaking his head meanwhile, *as who should say 'let no man contradict me, for I won't believe him,'* that Willet was in amazing force to-night."

The riots form a series of vivid pictures never surpassed. At page 17, the road between London and the Maypole is described as a horribly rough and dangerous, and at page 97, as an uncommonly smooth and convenient one. At page 116, how comes Chester in possession of the key of Mrs. Rudge's vacated house?

Mr. Dickens' English is usually pure. His most remarkable error is that of employing the adverb "directly" in the sense of "as soon as." For example—"Directly he arrived, Rudge said," etc. Bulwer is uniformly guilty of the same blunder.

It is observable that so original a stylist as our author should occasionally lapse into a gross imitation of what, itself, is a gross imitation. We mean the manner of Lamb—a manner based in the Latin construction. For example—

"In summer time its pumps suggest to thirsty idlers springs cooler and more sparkling and deeper than other wells; and as they trace the spillings of full pitchers on the heated ground, they snuff the freshness, and, sighing, cast sad looks towards the Thames, and think of baths and boats, and saunter on despondent."

There are many *coincidences* wrought into the narrative—those, for example, which relate to the nineteenth of March; the dream of Barnaby, respecting his father, at the very period when his father is actually in the house; and the dream of Haredale previous to his final meeting with Chester. These things are meant to *insinuate* a fatality which, very properly, is not expressed in plain terms—but it is questionable whether

the story derives more in ideality from their introduction, than it might have gained of verisimilitude from their omission.

The *dramatis personæ* sustain the high fame of Mr. Dickens as a delineator of character. Miggs, the disconsolate handmaiden of Varden; Tappertit, his chivalrous apprentice; Mrs. Varden, herself; and Dennis, a hangman—may be regarded as original caricatures, of the highest merit as such. Their traits are founded in acute observation of nature, but are exaggerated to the utmost admissible extent. Miss Haredale and Edward Chester are commonplaces—no effort has been made in their behalf. Joe Willet is a naturally drawn country youth. Stagg is a mere make-weight. Gashford and Gordon are truthfully copied. Dolly Varden is truth itself. Haredale, Rudge and Mrs. Rudge, are impressive only through the circumstances which surround them. Sir John Chester, is, of course, not original, but is a vast improvement upon all his predecessors—his heartlessness is rendered somewhat too amusing, and his end too much that of a man of honour. Hugh is a noble conception. His fierce exultation in his animal powers; his subserviency to the smooth Chester; his mirthful contempt and patronage of Tappertit, and his *brutal* yet firm courage in the hour of death—form a picture to be set in diamonds. Old Willet is not surpassed by any character even among those of Dickens. He is nature itself—yet a step farther would have placed him in the class of caricatures. His combined conceit and obtusity are indescribably droll, and his peculiar misdirected energy when aroused, is one of the most exquisite touches in all humorous painting. We shall

never forget how heartily we laughed at his shaking Solomon Daisy and threatening to put him behind the fire, because the unfortunate little man was too much frightened to articulate. Varden is one of those free, jovial, honest fellows at charity with all mankind, whom our author is so fond of depicting. And lastly, Barnaby, the hero of the tale—in him we have been somewhat disappointed. We have already said that his delight in the atrocities of the Rebellion is at variance with his horror of blood. But this horror of blood is *inconsequential;* and of this we complain. Strongly insisted upon in the beginning of the narrative, it produces no adequate result. And here how fine an opportunity has Mr. Dickens missed! The conviction of the assassin, after the lapse of twenty-two years, might easily have been brought about through his son's mysterious awe of blood—*an awe created in the unborn by the assassination itself*—and this would have been one of the finest possible embodiments of the idea which we are accustomed to attach to "poetical justice." The raven, too, intensely amusing as it is, might have been made, more than we now see it, a portion of the conception of the fantastic Barnaby. Its croakings might have been *prophetically* heard in the course of the drama. Its character might have performed, in regard to that of the idiot, much the same part as does, in music, the accompaniment in respect to the air. Each might have been distinct. Each might have differed remarkably from the other. Yet between them there might have been wrought an analogical resemblance, and although each might have existed apart, they might have formed together a whole which would have been imperfect in the absence of either.

From what we have here said—and, perhaps, said without due deliberation—(for alas! the hurried duties of the journalist preclude it) there will not be wanting those who will accuse us of a mad design to detract from the pure fame of the novelist. But to such we merely say in the language of heraldry "ye should wear a plain point sanguine in your arms." If this be understood, well; if not, well again. There lives no man feeling a deeper reverence for genius than ourself. If we have not dwelt so especially upon the high merits as upon the trivial defects of "Barnaby Rudge" we have already given our reasons for the omission, and these reasons will be sufficiently understood by all whom we care to understand them. The work before us is not, we think, equal to the tale which immediately preceded it; but there are few—very few others to which we consider it inferior. Our chief objection has not, perhaps, been so distinctly stated as we could wish. That this fiction, or indeed that any fiction written by Mr. Dickens, should be based in the excitement and maintenance of curiosity we look upon as a misconception, on the part of the writer, of his own very great yet very peculiar powers. He has done this thing well, to be sure—he would do any thing well in comparison with the herd of his contemporaries—but he has not done it so thoroughly well as his high and just reputation would demand. We think that the whole book has been an effort to him—solely through the nature of its design. He has been smitten with an untimely desire for a novel path. The idiosyncrasy of his intellect would lead him, naturally, into the most fluent and simple style of narration. In tales of ordinary sequence he may and will long reign

triumphant. He has a *talent* for all things, but no positive *genius* for *adaptation*, and still less for that metaphysical art in which the souls of all *mysteries* lie. "Caleb Williams" is a far less noble work than "The Old Curiosity Shop"; but Mr. Dickens could no more have constructed the one than Mr. Godwin could have dreamed of the other.

LONGFELLOW'S BALLADS

[*Ballads and Other Poems*, by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, reviewed in *Graham's Magazine*, April, 1842. In the first part of the review Poe states his objections to Longfellow's themes: they are concerned too much with didacticism and too little with pure beauty. In the following extract Poe applies his thesis to individual poems. We omit the strictures on Longfellow's hexameters.]

We have thus shown our ground of objection to the general *themes* of Professor Longfellow. In common with all who claim the sacred title of poet, he should limit his endeavors to the creation of novel moods of beauty, in form, in color, in sound, in sentiment; for over all this wide range has the poetry of words dominion. To what the world terms *prose* may be safely and properly left all else. The artist who doubts of his thesis, may always resolve his doubt by the single question—"might not this matter be as well or better handled in *prose*?" If it *may*, then is it no subject for the Muse. In the general acceptation of the term *Beauty* we are content to rest; being careful only to suggest that, in our peculiar views, it must be understood as inclusive of *the sublime*.

Of the pieces which constitute the present volume, there are not more than one or two thoroughly fulfilling the idea above proposed; although the volume as a whole is by no means so chargeable with didacticism as Mr. Longfellow's previous book. We would mention as poems *nearly true*, "The Village Blacksmith," "The Wreck of the Hesperus," and especially "The Skeleton in Armor." In the first-mentioned we have the *beauty* of simple-mindedness as a genuine thesis; and this thesis is inimitably handled until the concluding stanza, where the spirit of legitimate poesy is aggrieved in the pointed antithetical deduction of a *moral* from what has gone before. In "The Wreck of the Hesperus" we have the *beauty* of child-like confidence and innocence, with that of the father's stern courage and affection. But, with slight exception, those particulars of the storm here detailed are not poetic subjects. Their thrilling *horror* belongs to prose, in which it could be far more effectively discussed, as Professor Longfellow may assure himself at any moment by experiment. There *are* points of a tempest which afford the loftiest and truest poetical themes—points in which pure beauty is found, or, better still, beauty heightened into the sublime, by terror. But when we read, among other similar things, that

> The salt sea was frozen on her breast,
> The salt tears in her eyes,

we feel, if not positive disgust, at least a chilling sense of the inappropriate. In the "Skeleton in Armor" we find a pure and perfect thesis artistically treated. We find the beauty of bold courage and self-confidence, of love and maiden devotion, of reckless adventure,

and finally of life-contemning grief. Combined with all this we have numerous *points* of beauty apparently insulated, but all aiding the main effect or impression. The heart is stirred, and the mind does not lament its mal-instruction. The metre is simple, sonorous, well-balanced, and fully adapted to the subject. Upon the whole, there are few truer poems than this. It has but one defect—an important one. The prose remarks prefacing the narrative are really *necessary*. But every work of art should contain within itself all that is requisite for its own comprehension. And this remark is especially true of the ballad. In poems of magnitude the mind of the reader is not, at all times, enabled to include, in one comprehensive survey, the proportions and proper adjustment of the whole. He is pleased, if at all, with particular passages; and the sum of his pleasure is compounded of the sums of the pleasurable sentiments inspired by these individual passages in the progress of perusal. But, in pieces of less extent, the pleasure is *unique,* in the proper acceptation of this term—the understanding is employed, without difficulty, in the contemplation of the picture *as a whole*; and thus its effect will depend, in great measure, upon the perfection of its finish, upon the nice adaptation of its constituent parts, and especially, upon what is rightly termed by Schlegel *the unity or totality of interest.* But the practice of prefixing explanatory passages is utterly at variance with such unity. By the prefix, we are either put in possession of the subject of the poem; or some hint, historic fact, or suggestion, is thereby afforded, not included in the body of the piece, which, without the hint, is incomprehensible. In the latter case, while

perusing the poem, the reader must revert, in mind at least, to the prefix, for the necessary explanation. In the former, the poem being a mere paraphrase of the prefix, the interest is divided between the prefix and the paraphrase. In either instance the totality of effect is destroyed.

Of the other original poems in the volume before us, there is none in which the aim of instruction, or *truth*, has not been too obviously substituted for the legitimate aim, *beauty*. In our last number, we took occasion to say that a didactic moral might be happily made the *under-current* of a poetical theme, and, in "Burton's Magazine," some two years since, we treated this point at length, in a review of Moore's "Alciphron" but the moral thus conveyed is invariably an ill effect when obtruding beyond the upper current of the thesis itself. Perhaps the worst specimen of this obtrusion is given us by our poet in "Blind Bartimeus" and the "Goblet of Life," where, it will be observed that the *sole* interest of the upper current of meaning depends upon its relation or reference to the under. What we read upon the surface would be *vox et præterea nihil* in default of the moral beneath. The Greek *finales* of "Blind Bartimeus" are an affectation altogether inexcusable. What the small, second-hand, Gibbon-ish pedantry of Byron introduced, is unworthy the imitation of Longfellow.

Of the translations we scarcely think it necessary to speak at all. We regret that our poet will persist in busying himself about such matters. *His* time might be better employed in original conception. Most of these versions are marked with the error upon which we have commented. This error is in fact, es-

sentially Germanic. "The Luck of Edenhall," however, is a truly beautiful poem; and we say this with all that deference which the opinion of the "Democratic Review" demands. This composition appears to us *one of the very finest.* It has all the free, hearty, *obvious* movement of the true ballad-legend. The greatest force of language is combined in it with the richest imagination, acting in its most legitimate province. Upon the whole, we prefer it even to the "Sword-Song" of Körner. The pointed moral with which it terminates is so exceedingly natural—so perfectly fluent from the incidents—that we have hardly heart to pronounce it in ill taste. We may observe of this ballad, in conclusion, that its subject is more *physical* than is usual in Germany. Its images are rich rather in physical than in moral beauty. And this tendency, in Song, is the true one. It is chiefly, if we are not mistaken—it is chiefly amid forms of physical loveliness (we use the word *forms* in its widest sense as embracing modifications of sound and color) that the soul seeks the realization of its dreams of BEAUTY. It is to her demand in this sense especially, that the poet, who is wise, will most frequently and most earnestly respond.....

As we have already alluded, in one or two regards, to a notice of these poems which appeared in the "Democratic Review," we may as well here proceed with some few further comments upon the article in question—with whose general tenor we are happy to agree.

The Review speaks of "Maidenhood" as a poem, "not to be understood but at the expense of more time and trouble than a song can justly claim." We

are scarcely less surprised at this opinion from Mr. Langtree than we were at the condemnation of "The Luck of Edenhall."

"Maidenhood" is faulty, it appears to us, only on the score of its theme, which is somewhat didactic. Its *meaning* seems simplicity itself. A maiden on the verge of womanhood, hesitating to enjoy life (for which she has a strong appetite) through a false idea of duty, is bidden to fear nothing, having purity of heart as her lion of Una.

What Mr. Langtree styles "an unfortunate peculiarity" in Mr. Longfellow, resulting from "adherence to a false system" has really been always regarded by us as one of his idiosyncratic merits. "In each poem," says the critic, "he has but *one* idea which, in the progress of his song, is gradually unfolded, and at last reaches its full development in the concluding lines; this singleness of thought might lead a harsh critic to suspect intellectual barrenness." It leads *us*, individually, only to a full sense of the artistical power and knowledge of the poet. We confess that now, for the first time, we hear unity of conception objected to as a defect. But Mr. Langtree seems to have fallen into the singular error of supposing the poet to have absolutely *but one idea* in each of his ballads. Yet how "one idea" can be "gradually unfolded" without other ideas, is, to us, a mystery of mysteries. Mr. Longfellow, very properly, has but one *leading* idea which forms the basis of his poem; but to the aid and development of this one there are innumerable others, of which the rare excellence is, that all are in keeping, that none could be well omitted, that each tends to the

one general effect. It is unnecessary to say another word upon this topic.

In speaking of "Excelsior," Mr. Langtree (are we wrong in attributing the notice to his very forcible pen?) seems to labor under some similar misconception. "It carries along with it," says he, "a false moral which greatly diminishes its merit in our eyes. The great merit of a picture, whether made with the pencil or pen, is its *truth*; and this merit does not belong to Mr. Longfellow's sketch. Men of genius may and probably do, meet with greater difficulties in their struggles with the world than their fellow-men who are less highly gifted; but their power of overcoming obstacles is proportionably greater, and the result of their laborious suffering is not death but immortality."

That the chief merit of a picture is its *truth,* is an assertion deplorably erroneous. Even in Painting, which is, more essentially than Poetry, a mimetic art, the proposition cannot be sustained. Truth is not even *the aim.* Indeed it is curious to observe how very slight a degree of truth is sufficient to satisfy the mind, which acquiesces in the absence of numerous essentials in the thing depicted. An outline frequently stirs the spirit more pleasantly than the most elaborate picture. We need only refer to the compositions of Flaxman and of Retzsch. Here all details are omitted —nothing can be farther from *truth.* Without even color the most thrilling effects are produced. In statues we are rather pleased than disgusted with *the want of the eyeball.* The hair of the Venus de Medici *was gilded.* Truth indeed! The grapes of Zeuxis as well as the curtain of Parrhasius were received as indisputable evidence of the truthful ability of these

artists—but they are not even *classed among their pictures.* If truth is the highest aim of either Painting or Poesy, then Jan Steen was a greater artist than Angelo, and Crabbe is a more noble poet than Milton.

But we have not quoted the observation of Mr. Langtree to deny its philosophy; our design was simply to show that he has misunderstood the poet. "Excelsior" has not even a remote tendency to the interpretation assigned it by the critic. It depicts the *earnest upward impulse of the soul*—an impulse not to be subdued even in Death. Despising danger, resisting pleasure, the youth, bearing the banner inscribed "*Excelsior!*" (higher still!) struggles through all difficulties to an Alpine summit. Warned to be content with the elevation attained, his cry is still "*Excelsior!*" And, even in falling dead on the highest pinnacle, his cry is *still "Excelsior!"* There is yet an immortal height to be surmounted—an ascent in Eternity. The poet holds in view the idea of never-ending *progress.* That he is misunderstood is rather the misfortune of Mr. Langtree than the fault of Mr. Longfellow. There is an old adage about the difficulty of one's furnishing an auditor both with matter to be comprehended and brains for its comprehension.

THE TECHNIQUE OF THE SHORT STORY

[*Twice-Told Tales,* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, reviewed in *Graham's Magazine,* May, 1842. Judged by its effect, the paragraph beginning, "A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale," is probably the most significant in the annals of American literary criticism. It heralded the birth of the American short story as a distinct literary type.]

But it is of his tales that we desire principally to speak. The tale proper, in our opinion, affords unquestionably the fairest field for the exercise of the loftiest talent, which can be afforded by the wide domains of mere prose. Were we bidden to say how the highest genius could be most advantageously employed for the best display of its own powers, we should answer, without hesitation—in the composition of a rhymed poem, not to exceed in length what might be perused in an hour. Within this limit alone can the highest order of true poetry exist. We need only here say, upon this topic, that, in almost all classes of composition, the unity of effect or impression is a point of the greatest importance. It is clear, moreover, that this unity cannot be thoroughly preserved in productions whose perusal cannot be completed at one sitting. We may continue the reading of a prose composition, from the very nature of prose itself, much longer than we can persevere, to any good purpose, in the perusal of a poem. This latter, if truly fulfilling the demands of the poetic sentiment, induces an exaltation of the soul which cannot be long sustained. All high excitements are necessarily transient. Thus a long poem is a paradox. And, without unity of impression, the deepest effects cannot be brought about. Epics were the offspring of an imperfect sense of Art, and their reign is no more. A poem *too* brief may produce a vivid, but never an intense or enduring impression. Without a certain continuity of effort—without a certain duration or repetition of purpose—the soul is never deeply moved. There must be the dropping of the water upon the rock. De Béranger has wrought brilliant things

—pungent and spirit-stirring—but, like all immassive bodies, they lack *momentum,* and thus fail to satisfy the Poetic Sentiment. They sparkle and excite, but, from want of continuity, fail deeply to impress. Extreme brevity will degenerate into epigrammatism; but the sin of extreme length is even more unpardonable. *In medio tutissimus ibis.*

Were we called upon, however, to designate that class of composition which, next to such a poem as we have suggested, should best fulfil the demands of high genius—should offer it the most advantageous field of exertion—we should unhesitatingly speak of the prose tale, as Mr. Hawthorne has here exemplified it. We allude to the short prose narrative, requiring from a half-hour to one or two hours in its perusal. The ordinary novel is objectionable, from its length, for reasons already stated in substance. As it cannot be read at one sitting, it deprives itself, of course, of the immense force derivable from *totality.* Worldly interests intervening during the pauses of perusal, modify, annul, or counteract, in a greater or less degree, the impressions of the book. But simple cessation in reading, would, of itself, be sufficient to destroy the true unity. In the brief tale, however, the author is enabled to carry out the fulness of his intention, be it what it may. During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer's control. There are no external or extrinsic influences—resulting from weariness or interruption.

A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought

out, he then invents such incidents—he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the out-bringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed; and this is an end unattainable by the novel. Undue brevity is just as exceptionable here as in the poem; but undue length is yet more to be avoided.

We have said that the tale has a point of superiority even over the poem. In fact, while the *rhythm* of this latter is an essential aid in the development of the poem's highest idea—the idea of the Beautiful—the artificialities of this rhythm are an inseparable bar to the development of all points of thought or expression which have their basis in *Truth*. But Truth is often, and in very great degree, the aim of the tale. Some of the finest tales are tales of ratiocination. Thus the field of this species of composition, if not in so elevated a region on the mountain of Mind, is a table-land of far vaster extent than the domain of the mere poem. Its products are never so rich, but infinitely more numerous, and more appreciable by the mass of mankind. The writer of the prose tale, in short, may bring to his theme a vast variety of modes or inflections of thought and expression—(the ratiocinative, for example, the sarcastic or the humorous)

which are not only antagonistical to the nature of the poem, but absolutely forbidden by one of its most peculiar and indispensable adjuncts; we allude, of course, to rhythm. It may be added, here, *par parenthèse,* that the author who aims at the purely beautiful in a prose tale is laboring at great disadvantage. For Beauty can be better treated in the poem. Not so with terror, or passion, or horror, or a multitude of such other points. And here it will be seen how full of prejudice are the usual animadversions against those *tales of effect,* many fine examples of which were found in the earlier numbers of Blackwood. The impressions produced were wrought in a legitimate sphere of action, and constituted a legitimate although sometimes an exaggerated interest. They were relished by every man of genius: although there were found many men of genius who condemned them without just ground. The true critic will but demand that the design intended be accomplished, to the fullest extent, by the means most advantageously applicable.

We have very few American tales of real merit—we may say, indeed, none, with the exception of "The Tales of a Traveller" of Washington Irving, and these "Twice-Told Tales" of Mr. Hawthorne. Some of the pieces of Mr. John Neal abound in vigor and originality; but in general, his compositions of this class are excessively diffuse, extravagant, and indicative of an imperfect sentiment of Art. Articles at random are, now and then, met with in our periodicals which might be advantageously compared with the best effusions of the British Magazines; but, upon the whole, we are far behind our progenitors in this department of literature.

Of Mr. Hawthorne's Tales we would say, emphatically, that they belong to the highest region of Art—an Art subservient to genius of a very lofty order. We had supposed, with good reason for so supposing, that he had been thrust into his present position by one of the impudent *cliques* which beset our literature, and whose pretensions it is our full purpose to expose at the earliest opportunity; but we have been most agreeably mistaken. We know of few compositions which the critic can more honestly commend than these "Twice-Told Tales." As Americans, we feel proud of the book.

Mr. Hawthorne's distinctive trait is invention, creation, imagination, originality—a trait which, in the literature of fiction, is positively worth all the rest. But the nature of originality, so far as regards its manifestation in letters, is but imperfectly understood. The inventive or original mind as frequently displays itself in novelty of *tone* as in novelty of manner. Mr. Hawthorne is original at *all* points.

It would be a matter of some difficulty to designate the best of these tales; we repeat that, without exception, they are beautiful. "Wakefield" is remarkable for the skill with which an old idea—a well-known incident—is worked up or discussed. A man of whims conceives the purpose of quitting his wife and residing *incognito*, for twenty years, in her immediate neighborhood. Something of this kind actually happened in London. The force of Mr. Hawthorne's tale lies in the analysis of the motives which must or might have impelled the husband to such folly, in the first instance, with the possible causes of his persever-

ance. Upon this thesis a sketch of singular power has been constructed.

"The Wedding Knell" is full of the boldest imagination—an imagination fully controlled by taste. The most captious critic could find no flaw in this production.

"The Minister's Black Veil' is a masterly composition of which the sole defect is that to the rabble its exquisite skill will be *caviare*. The *obvious* meaning of this article will be found to smother its insinuated one. The *moral* put into the mouth of the dying minister will be supposed to convey the *true* import of the narrative; and that a crime of dark dye, (having reference to the "young lady") has been committed, is a point which only minds congenial with that of the author will perceive.

"Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe" is vividly original and managed most dexterously.

"Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" is exceedingly well imagined, and executed with surpassing ability. The artist breathes in every line of it.

"The White Old Maid" is objectionable, even more than the "Minister's Black Veil," on the score of its mysticism. Even with the thoughtful and analytic, there will be much trouble in penetrating its entire import.

"The Hollow of the Three Hills" we would quote in full, had we space;—not as evincing higher talent than any of the other pieces, but as affording an excellent example of the author's peculiar ability. The subject is commonplace. A witch subjects the Distant and the Past to the view of a mourner. It has been the fashion to describe, in such cases, a mirror in

which the images of the absent appear; or a cloud of smoke is made to arise, and thence the figures are gradually unfolded. Mr. Hawthorne has wonderfully heightened his effect by making the ear, in place of the eye, the medium by which the fantasy is conveyed. The head of the mourner is enveloped in the cloak of the witch, and within its magic folds there arise sounds which have an all-sufficient intelligence. Throughout this article also, the artist is conspicuous —not more in positive than in negative merits. Not only is all done that should be done, but (what perhaps is an end with more difficulty attained) there is nothing else done which should not be. Every word *tells,* and there is not a word which does *not* tell.

In "Howe's Masquerade" we observe something which resembles a plagiarism—but which *may be* a very flattering coincidence of thought. We quote the passage in question.

"*With a dark flush of wrath* upon his brow they saw the general *draw his sword* and *advance to meet* the figure *in the cloak* before the latter had stepped one pace upon the floor.

"'Villain, *unmuffle yourself,*' cried he, 'you pass no farther!'

"The figure, without blanching a hair's breadth from the sword which was pointed at his breast, made a solemn pause, and lowered the cape of the cloak from his face, yet not sufficiently for the spectators to catch a glimpse of it. But Sir William Howe had evidently seen enough. The sternness of his countenance gave place to a look of wild amazement, if not

horror, while he recoiled several steps from the figure, *and let fall his sword* upon the floor."

The idea here is, that the figure in the cloak is the phantom or reduplication of Sir William Howe; but in an article called "William Wilson," one of the "Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque," we have not only the same idea, but the same idea similarly presented in several respects. We quote two paragraphs, which our readers may compare with what has been already given. We have italicized, above, the immediate particulars of resemblance.

"The brief moment in which I averted my eyes had been sufficient to produce, apparently, a material change in the arrangement at the upper or farther end of the room. A large mirror, it appeared to me, now stood where none had been perceptible before: and as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, *advanced* with a feeble and tottering gait to meet me.

"Thus it appeared I say, but was not. It was Wilson, who then stood before me in the agonies of dissolution. Not a line in all the marked and singular lineaments of that face which was not even identically mine own. *His mask and cloak lay where he had thrown them, upon the floor.*"

Here it will be observed that, not only are the two general conceptions identical, but there are various *points* of similarity. In each case the figure seen is the wraith or duplication of the beholder. In each case the scene is a masquerade. In each case the fig-

ure is cloaked. In each, there is a quarrel—that is to say, angry words pass between the parties. In each the beholder is enraged. In each the cloak and sword fall upon the floor. The "villain, unmuffle yourself," of Mr. H. is precisely paralleled by a passage at page 56 of "William Wilson."

In the way of objection we have scarcely a word to say of these tales. There is, perhaps, a somewhat too general or prevalent *tone*—a tone of melancholy and mysticism. The subjects are insufficiently varied. There is not so much of *versatility* evinced as we might well be warranted in expecting from the high powers of Mr. Hawthorne. But beyond these trivial exceptions we have really none to make. The style is purity itself. Force abounds. High imagination gleams from every page. Mr. Hawthorne is a man of the truest genius. We only regret that the limits of our Magazine will not permit us to pay him that full tribute of commendation, which, under other circumstances, we should be so eager to pay.

REPETITION AN AID TO QUAINTNESS

[*The Drama of Exile and Other Poems,* by Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, reviewed in *The Broadway Journal,* January 4 and 11, 1845. Poe's poems are so instinct with rhythmical repetitions that every reference to the subject in his critical reviews is an aid in the interpretation of his own art. In Ralph Hoyt's *Old,* Poe thought the repetition overdone: "In his continuous and absolutely uniform repetition of the first line in the last of each stanza, he has by much exceeded the legitimate limits of the quaint, and im-

pinged upon the simply ludicrous." But of Hood's *Haunted House,* Poe writes: "The metre and rhythm are not only, in themselves, admirably adapted to the whole design, but with a true artistic feeling, the poet has preserved a thorough monotone throughout, and renders its effect more impressive by the repetition (gradually increasing in frequency towards the *finale*) of one of the most pregnant and effective of the stanzas."]

We have already said, however, that mere *quaintness* within reasonable limit, is not only *not* to be regarded as affectation, but has its proper artistic uses in aiding a fantastic effect. We quote, from the lines "To my dog Flush," a passage in exemplification:

> Leap! thy broad tail waves a light!
> Leap! thy slender feet are bright,
> Canopied in fringes!
> Leap! those tasselled ears of thine
> Flicker strangely, fair and fine,
> Down their golden inches!

And again—from the song of a tree-spirit, in the "Drama of Exile:"

> The Divine impulsion cleaves
> In dim movements to the leaves
> *Dropt and lifted, dropt and lifted,*
> In the sun-light greenly sifted,—
> *In the sun-light and the moon-light*
> *Greenly sifted through the trees.*
> Ever wave the Eden trees,
> *In the night-light and the noon-light,*
> With a ruffling of green branches,
> *Shaded off to resonances,*
> Never stirred by rain or breeze.

The thoughts, here, belong to the highest order of poetry, but they could not have been wrought into ef-

fective expression, without the instrumentality of those repetitions—those unusual phrases—in a word, those *quaintnesses,* which it has been too long the fashion to censure, indiscriminately, under the one general head of "affectation." No true poet will fail to be enraptured with the two extracts above quoted—but we believe there are few who would not find a difficulty in reconciling the psychal impossibility of refraining from admiration, with the too-hastily attained mental conviction that, critically, there is nothing to admire.

SHELLEY AND AFTER

[This is the concluding part of Poe's review of Miss Barrett's *Drama of Exile.* See the preceding selection. It is well to compare with this bit of evolutionary criticism of Shelley Poe's only appraisal of Keats: "He is the sole British poet who has never erred in his themes. Beauty is always his aim."]

If ever mortal "wreaked his thoughts upon expression" it was Shelley. If ever poet sang (as a bird sings)—impulsively—earnestly—with utter abandonment—to himself solely—and for the mere joy of his own song—that poet was the author of the "Sensitive Plant." Of Art—beyond that which is the inalienable instinct of Genius—he either had little or disdained all. He *really* disdained that Rule which is the emanation from Law, because his own soul was law in itself. His rhapsodies are but the rough notes—the stenographic memoranda of poems—memoranda which, because they were all-sufficient for his own intelligence, he cared not to be at the trouble of transcribing in full

for mankind. In his whole life he wrought not thoroughly out a single conception. For this reason it is that he is the most fatiguing of poets. Yet he wearies in having done too little, rather than too much; what seems in him the diffuseness of one idea, is the conglomerate concision of many;—and this concision it is which renders him obscure. With such a man, to imitate was out of the question; it would have answered no purpose—for he spoke to his own spirit alone, which would have comprehended no alien tongue;—he was, therefore, profoundly original. His quaintness arose from intuitive perception of that truth to which Lord Verulam alone has given distinct voice:—"There is no exquisite beauty which has not some strangeness in its proportion." But whether obscure, original, or quaint, he was at all times sincere. He had no *affectations*.

From the ruins of Shelley there sprang into existence, affronting the Heavens, a tottering and fantastic pagoda, in which the salient angles, tipped with mad jangling bells, were the idiosyncratic *faults* of the great original—faults which cannot be called such in view of his purposes, but which are monstrous when we regard his works as addressed to mankind. A "school" arose—if that absurd term must still be employed—a school—a system of rules—upon the basis of the Shelley who had none. Young men innumerable, dazzled with the glare and bewildered with the *bizarrerie* of the divine lighting that flickered through the clouds of the "Prometheus," had no trouble whatever in heaping up imitative vapors, but, for the lightning, were content, perforce, with its *spectrum, in* which the *bizarrerie* appeared without the fire. Nor

were great and mature minds unimpressed by the contemplation of a greater and more mature; and thus gradually were interwoven into this school of all Lawlessness—of obscurity, quaintness, exaggeration—the misplaced didacticism of Wordsworth, and even more preposterously anomalous metaphysicianism of Coleridge. Matters were now fast verging to their worst, and at length in Tennyson, poetic inconsistency attained its extreme. But it was precisely this extreme (for the greatest error and the greatest truth are scarcely two points in a circle)—it was this extreme which, following the law of all extremes, wrought in him—in Tennyson—a natural and inevitable revulsion, leading him first to contemn and secondly to investigate his early manner, and, finally, to winnow from its magnificent elements the truest and purest of all poetical styles. But not even yet is the process complete; and for this reason in part, but chiefly on account of the mere fortuitousness of that mental and moral combination which shall unite in one person (if *ever* it shall) the Shelleyan *abandon*, the Tennysonian poetic sense, the most profound instinct of Art, and the sternest Will properly to blend and vigorously to control all;—chiefly, we say, because such combination of antagonisms must be purely fortuitous, has the world never yet seen the noblest of the poems of which it is *possible* that it may be put in possession.

And yet Miss Barrett has narrowly missed the fulfilment of these conditions. Her poetic inspiration is the highest—we can conceive nothing more august. Her sense of Art is pure in itself, but has been contaminated by pedantic study of false models—a study which has the more easily led her astray, because she

placed an undue value upon it as rare—as alien to her character of woman. The accident of having been long secluded by ill health from the world has effected, moreover, in her behalf, what an innate recklessness did for Shelley—has imparted to her, if not precisely that *abandon* to which I have referred, at least a something that stands well in its stead—a comparative independence of men and opinions with which she did not come personally in contact—a happy audacity of thought and expression never before known in one of her sex. It is, however, this same accident of ill health, perhaps, which has invalidated her original Will—diverted her from proper individuality of purpose—and seduced her into the sin of imitation. Thus, what she might have done, we cannot altogether determine. What she has actually accomplished is before us. With Tennyson's works beside her, and a keen appreciation of them in her soul—appreciation too keen to be discriminative;—with an imagination ethereally delicate; with inferior art and more feeble volition; she has written poems such as he *could not write,* but such as he, under *her* conditions of ill health and seclusion, *would have written* during the epoch of his pupildom in that school which arose out of Shelley, and from which, over a disgustful gulf of utter incongruity and absurdity, lit only by miasmatic flashes, into the broad open meadows of Natural Art and Divine Genius, he—Tennyson—is at once the bridge and the transition.

PLAGIARISM

[This selection, from *The Broadway Journal,* April 5, 1845, closed the so-called "Longfellow War," a war

about plagiarism, in which Longfellow took no part. The mystery of "Outis," who entered the lists in behalf of Longfellow, remains still unsolved; but he was a foeman worthy of Poe's steel.]

It should not be supposed that I feel myself individually aggrieved in the letter of Outis. He has praised me even more than he has blamed. In replying to him, my design has been to place fairly and distinctly before the literary public certain principles of criticism for which I have been long contending, and which through sheer misrepresentation, were in danger of being misunderstood.

Having brought the subject, in this view, to a close in the last "Journal," I now feel at liberty to add a few words of postscript, by way of freeing myself of any suspicion of malevolence or discourtesy. The thesis of my argument, in general, has been the definition of the grounds on which a charge of plagiarism may be based, and of the species of ratiocination by which it is to be established: that is all. It will be seen by any one who shall take the trouble to read what I have written, that I make *no* charge of moral delinquency against either Mr. Longfellow, Mr. Aldrich, or Mr. Hood:—indeed, lest in the heat of argument, I may have uttered any words which may admit of being tortured into such an interpretation, I here fully disclaim them upon the spot.

In fact, the one strong point of defence for his friends has been unaccountably neglected by Outis. To attempt the rebutting of a charge of plagiarism by the broad assertion that no such thing as plagiarism exists, is a sotticism, and no more—but there would

have been nothing of unreason in rebutting the charge as urged either against Mr. Longfellow, Mr. Aldrich, or Mr. Hood, by the proposition that no true poet can be guilty of a meanness—that the converse of the proposition is a contradiction in terms. Should there be found any one willing to dispute with me this point, I would decline the disputation on the ground that my arguments are no arguments *to him*.

It appears to me that what seems to be the gross *inconsistency* of plagiarism as perpetrated by a poet, is very easily thus resolved:—the poetic sentiment (even without reference to the poetic power) implies a peculiarly, perhaps abnormally keen appreciation of the beautiful, with a longing for its assimilation, or absorption, into poetic identity. What the poet intensely admires, becomes thus, in very fact, although only partially, a portion of his own intellect. It has secondary origination within his own soul—an origination altogether apart, although springing from its primary origination from without. The poet is thus possessed by another's thought, and cannot be said to take of it, possession. But, in either view, he thoroughly feels it as *his own*—and this feeling is counteracted only by the sensible presence of its true, palpable origin in the volume from which he has derived it—an origin which, in the long lapse of years it is almost impossible not to forget—for in the meantime the thought itself is forgotten. But the frailest association will regenerate it—it springs up with all the vigor of a new birth—its absolute originality is not even a matter of suspicion—and when the poet has written it and printed it, and on its account is charged with plagiarism, there will be no one in the world more entirely

astounded than himself. Now from what I have said it will be evident that the liability to accidents of this character is in the direct ratio of the poetic sentiment —of the susceptibility to the poetic impressions; and in fact all literary history demonstrates that, for the most frequent and palpable plagiarisms, we must search the works of the most eminent poets.

HOW TO IMPROVE OUR DRAMA

[From *The American Whig Review,* August, 1845. The greater part of Poe's article on *The American Drama* is devoted to a detailed criticism of N. P. Willis's *Tortesa* and Longfellow's *Spanish Student.* In the July preceding he had written: "The writer of this article is himself the son of an actress—has invariably made it his boast—and no earl was ever prouder of his earldom than he of the descent from a woman who, although well-born, hesitated not to consecrate to the drama her brief career of genius and beauty." The keynote of the following extract is struck by Poe in his *Marginalia*: "We must neglect our models and study our capabilities."]

A biographist of Berryer calls him *"l'homme qui, dans sa description, demande la plus grande quantité possible d'antithèse"*—but that ever recurring topic, the decline of the drama, seems to have consumed, of late, more of the material in question than would have sufficed for a dozen prime ministers—even admitting them to be French. Every trick of thought and every harlequinade of phrase has been put in operation for the purpose *"de nier ce qui est, et d'expliquer ce qui n'est pas."*

Ce qui n'est pas:—for the drama has *not declined.* The facts and the philosophy of the case seem to be these. The great opponent to Progress is Conservatism. In other words—the great adversary of Invention is Imitation:—the propositions are in spirit identical. Just as an art is imitative, it is stationary. The most imitative arts are the most prone to repose—and the converse. Upon the utilitarian—upon the business arts, where necessity impels, Invention, Necessity's well-understood offspring, is ever in attendance. And the less we see of the mother the less we behold of the child. No one complains of the decline of the art of Engineering. Here the Reason, which never retrogrades, or reposes, is called into play. But let us glance at Sculpture. We are not *worse,* here, than the ancients, let pedantry say what it may (the Venus of Canova is worth at any time two of that of Cleomenes), but it is equally certain that we have made, in general, no advances; and Sculpture, properly considered, is perhaps the *most* imitative of all arts which have a right to the title of Art at all. Looking next at Painting, we find that we have to boast of progress only in the ratio of the inferior imitativeness of Painting when compared with Sculpture. As far indeed as we have any means of judging, our improvement has been exceedingly little, and did we know anything of ancient Art in this department, we might be astonished at discovering that we had advanced even far less than we suppose. As regards Architecture, whatever progress we have made, has been precisely in those particulars which have no reference to imitation:—that is to say we have improved the utilitarian and not the ornamental provinces of the art. Where Rea-

son predominated, we advanced; where mere Feeling or Taste was the guide, we remained as we were.

Coming to the Drama, we shall see that in its mechanism we have made progress, while in its spirituality we have done little or nothing for centuries certainly—and, perhaps, little or nothing for thousands of years. And this is because what we term the spirituality of the drama is precisely its imitative portion—is exactly that portion which distinguishes it as one of the principal of the imitative arts.

Sculptors, painters, dramatists, are, from the very nature of their material,—their spiritual material—imitators—conservatists—prone to repose in old Feeling and in antique Taste. For this reason—and for this reason only—the arts of Sculpture, Painting, and the Drama have not advanced—or have advanced feebly, and inversely in the ratio of their imitativeness.

But it by no means follows that either has *declined*. All *seem* to have declined, because they have remained stationary while the multitudinous other arts (of reason) have flitted so rapidly by them. In the same manner the traveller by railroad can imagine that the trees by the wayside are retrograding. The trees in this case are absolutely stationary—but the Drama has not been altogether so, although its progress has been so slight as not to interfere with the general effect—that of seeming retrogradation or decline.

This seeming retrogradation, however, is to all practical intents an absolute one. Whether the drama has declined, or whether it has merely remained stationary, is a point of no importance, so far as concerns the public encouragement of the drama. It is unsupported, in either case, because it does not deserve support.

But if this stagnation, or deterioration, grows out of the very idiosyncrasy of the drama itself, as one of the principal of the imitative arts, how is it possible that a remedy shall be applied—since it is clearly impossible to alter the nature of the art, and yet leave it the art which it now is?

We have already spoken of the improvements effected, in Architecture, in all its utilitarian departments, and in the Drama, at all the points of its mechanism. "Wherever Reason predominates we advance; where mere Feeling or Taste is the guide, we remain as we are." We wish now to suggest that, by the engrafting of Reason upon Feeling and Taste, we shall be able, and thus alone shall be able, to force the modern Drama into the production of any profitable fruit.

At present, what is it we do? We are content if, with Feeling and Taste, a dramatist does *as other dramatists have done.* The most successful of the more immediately modern playwrights has been Sheridan Knowles and to play Sheridan Knowles seems to be the highest ambition of our writers for the stage. Now the author of "The Hunchback," possesses what we are weak enough to term the true "dramatic feeling," and this true dramatic feeling he has manifested in the most preposterous series of imitations of the Elizabethan drama, by which ever mankind were insulted and beguiled. Not only did he adhere to the old plots, the old characters, the old stage conventionalities throughout; but, he went even so far as to persist in the obsolete phraseologies of the Elizabethan period—and just in proportion to his obstinacy and absurdity at all points, did we pretend to like him the better, and pretend to consider him a great dramatist.

Pretend—for every particle of it was pretense. Never was enthusiasm more utterly false than that which so many "respectable audiences" endeavored to get up for these plays—endeavored to get up, first, because there was a general desire to see the drama revive, and secondly, because we had been all along entertaining the fancy that "the decline of the drama" meant little, if anything, else than its deviation from the Elizabethan routine—and that, consequently, the return to the Elizabethan routine was, and of necessity must be, the revival of the drama.

But if the principles we have been at some trouble in explaining, are true—and most profoundly do we feel them to be so—if the spirit of imitation is, in fact, the real source of the drama's stagnation—and if it is so because of the tendency in all imitation to render Reason subservient to Feeling and to Taste—it is clear that only by deliberate counteracting of the spirit, and of the tendency of the spirit, we can hope to succeed in the drama's revival.

The first thing necessary is to burn or bury the "old models," and to forget, as quickly as possible, that ever a play has been penned. The second thing is to consider *de novo* what are the *capabilities* of the drama—not merely what hitherto have been its conventional purposes. The third and last point has reference to the composition of a play (showing to the fullest extent these capabilities), conceived and constructed with Feeling and with Taste, but with Feeling and Taste guided and controlled in every particular by the details of Reason—of Common Sense—in a word, of a Natural Art.

It is obvious, in the meantime, that towards the

good end in view, much may be effected by discriminative criticism on what has already been done. The field, thus stated, is of course, practically illimitable—and to Americans the American drama is the special point of interest. We propose therefore, in a series of papers, to take a somewhat deliberate survey of some few of the most noticeable American plays. We shall do this without reference either to the date of the composition, or its adaptation for the closet or the stage. We shall speak with absolute frankness both of merits and defects—our principal object being understood not as that of mere commentary on the individual play—but on the drama in general, and on the American drama in especial, of which each individual play is a constituent part.

GERMAN CRITICISM

[*Thiodolf,* by Baron de la Motte Fouqué, reviewed in *Graham's Magazine,* December, 1846. Fouqué's *Undine* (1811) Poe considered almost faultless: "It is a model of models in regard to the high artistical talent which it evinces." His only objection was that, though not an allegory, "it has too close an affinity to that most indefensible species of writing." The following review barely mentions *Thiodolf* but contains a sort of summary of Poe's scattered comments on German literature and literary criticism. Of course both works had been translated before Poe wrote about them.]

This book could never have been popular out of Germany. It is too simple—too direct—too obvious—too *bald*—not sufficiently complex—to be relished by

any people who have *thoroughly* passed the first (or impulsive) epoch of literary civilization. The Germans have not yet passed this first epoch. It must be remembered that during *the whole of the middle ages they lived in utter ignorance of the art of writing*. From so total a darkness, of so late a date, they could not, *as a nation*, have as yet fully emerged into the second or critical epoch. Individual Germans have been critical in the best sense—but the masses are unleavened. Literary Germany thus presents the singular spectacle of the impulsive spirit surrounded by the critical, and, of course, in some measure influenced thereby. England, for example, has advanced far, and France much farther, into the critical epoch; and their effect on the German mind is seen in the wildly anomalous condition of the German literature at large. That this latter will be improved by age, however, should never be maintained. As the impulsive spirit subsides, and the critical uprises, there will appear the polished insipidity of the later England, or that ultimate *throe* of taste which has found its best exemplification in Sue. At present the German literature resembles no other on the face of the earth—for it is the result of certain conditions which, before this individual instance of their fulfillment, have never been fulfilled. And this anomalous state to which I refer is the source of our anomalous criticism upon what that state produces—is the source of the grossly conflicting opinions about German letters. For my own part, I admit the German vigor, the German directness, boldness, imagination, and some other qualities of impulse, just as I am willing to admit and admire these qualities in the first (or impulsive) epochs of British

and French letters. At the German criticism, however, I cannot refrain from laughing all the more heartily, all the more seriously I hear it praised. Not that, in detail, it affects me as an absurdity—but in the adaptation of its details. It abounds in brilliant bubbles of *suggestion*, but these rise and sink and jostle each other, until the whole vortex of thought in which they originate is one indistinguishable chaos of froth. The German criticism is *unsettled*, and can only be settled by time. At present it suggests without demonstrating, or convincing, or effecting any definite purpose under the sun. We read it, rub our foreheads, and ask "What then?" I am not ashamed to say that I prefer even Voltaire to Goethe, and hold Macaulay to possess more of the true critical spirit than Augustus William and Frederick Schlegel combined.

THE TECHNIQUE OF THE RAVEN

[Poe's *Philosophy of Composition*, first published in *Graham's Magazine*, April, 1846, and here reproduced entire, has been called a hoax by most foreign critics. Even Baudelaire thinks that "un peu de charlatanerie" is to be detected in it. On the contrary, it is nothing more than a summarized application of Poe's most characteristic principles of criticism. It does not deal with creation but with formal adaptation. Every point made may be found, explicit or implicit, in what Poe had already said about poetry in general or poems in particular. The reason that it gives offense to many Poe admirers is because its import is misunderstood. The article does not attempt to define genius,

far less to reduce genius to the level of the mechanical and mathematical. Its theme is neither genius nor the pathway by which genius arrives at its conceptions. Its sole and central question is,—Given genius, given the original inspiration, given the pre-determined conception, how does the poet go about embodying this conception in word, stanza, and melody? How does craftsmanship come to the aid of vision? Composition is the theme, not creation.]

Charles Dickens, in a note now lying before me, alluding to an examination I once made of the mechanism of "Barnaby Rudge," says—"By the way, are you aware that Godwin wrote his 'Caleb Williams' backwards? He first involved his hero in a web of difficulties, forming the second volume, and then, for the first, cast about him for some mode of accounting for what had been done."

I cannot think this the *precise* mode of procedure on the part of Godwin—and indeed what he himself acknowledges, is not altogether in accordance with Mr. Dickens' idea—but the author of "Caleb Williams" was too good an artist not to perceive the advantage derivable from at least a somewhat similar process. Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its *dénouement* before anything be attempted with the pen. It is only with the *dénouement* constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention.

There is a radical error, I think, in the usual mode of constructing a story. Either history affords a

thesis—or one is suggested by an incident of the day—or, at best, the author sets himself to work in the combination of striking events to form merely the basis of his narrative—designing, generally, to fill in with description, dialogue, or autorial comment, whatever crevices of fact, or action, may, from page to page, render themselves apparent.

I prefer commencing with the consideration of an *effect*. Keeping originality *always* in view—for he is false to himself who ventures to dispense with so obvious and so easily attainable a source of interest—I say to myself, in the first place, "Of the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?" Having chosen a novel, first, and secondly a vivid effect, I consider whether it can be best wrought by incident or tone—whether by ordinary incidents and peculiar tone, or the converse, or by peculiarity both of incident and tone—afterward looking about me (or rather within) for such combinations of event, or tone, as shall best aid me in the construction of the effect.

I have often thought how interesting a magazine paper might be written by any author who would—that is to say, who could—detail, step by step, the processes by which any one of his compositions attained its ultimate point of completion. Why such a paper has never been given to the world, I am much at a loss to say—but, perhaps, the autorial vanity has had more to do with the omission than any one other cause. Most writers—poets in especial—prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy—an ecstatic intuition—and would positively shudder

at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought—at the true purposes seized only at the last moment—at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view—at the fully matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable—at the cautious selections and rejections—at the painful erasures and interpolations—in a word, at the wheels and pinions—the tackle for scene-shifting—the step-ladders and demon-traps—the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which, in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred, constitute the properties of the literary *histrio*.

I am aware, on the other hand, that the case is by no means common, in which an author is at all in condition to retrace the steps by which his conclusions have been attained. In general, suggestions, having arisen pell-mell, are pursued and forgotten in a similar manner.

For my own part, I have neither sympathy with the repugnance alluded to, nor, at any time, the least difficulty in recalling to mind the progressive steps of any of my compositions; and, since the interest of an analysis, or reconstruction, such as I have considered a *desideratum*, is quite independent of any real or fancied interest in the thing analyzed, it will not be regarded as a breach of decorum on my part to show the *modus operandi* by which some one of my own works was put together. I select "The Raven," as the most generally known. It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referable either to accident or intuition—that the work pro-

ceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.

Let us dismiss, as irrelevant to the poem, *per se*, the circumstance—or say the necessity—which, in the first place, gave rise to the intention of composing a poem that should suit at once the popular and the critical taste.

We commence, then, with this intention.

The initial consideration was that of extent. If any literary work is too long to be read at one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression—for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and everything like totality is at once destroyed. But since, *ceteris paribus*, no poet can afford to dispense with *anything* that may advance his design, it but remains to be seen whether there is, in extent, any advantage to counterbalance the loss of unity which attends it. Here I say no, at once. What we term a long poem is, in fact, merely a succession of brief ones—that is to say, of brief poetical effects. It is needless to demonstrate that a poem is such, only inasmuch as it intensely excites, by elevating, the soul; and all intense excitements are, through a psychal necessity, brief. For this reason, at least one half of the "Paradise Lost" is essentially prose—a succession of poetical excitements interspersed, *inevitably*, with corresponding depressions—the whole being deprived, through the extremeness of its length, of the vastly important artistic element, totality, or unity, of effect.

It appears evident, then, that there is a distinct limit, as regards length, to all works of literary art—the limit of a single sitting—and that, although in cer-

tain classes of prose composition, such as "Robinson Crusoe," (demanding no unity,) this limit may be advantageously overpassed, it can never properly be overpassed in a poem. Within this limit, the extent of a poem may be made to bear mathematical relation to its merit—in other words, to the excitement or elevation—again in other words, to the degree of the true poetical effect which it is capable of inducing; for it is clear that the brevity must be in direct ratio of the intensity of the intended effect:—this, with one proviso—that a certain degree of duration is absolutely requisite for the production of any effect at all.

Holding in view these considerations, as well as that degree of excitement which I deemed not above the popular, while not below the critical, taste, I reached at once what I conceived the proper *length* for my intended poem—a length of about one hundred lines. It is, in fact, a hundred and eight.

My next thought concerned the choice of an impression, or effect, to be conveyed: and here I may as well observe that, throughout the construction, I kept steadily in view the design of rendering the work *universally* appreciable. I should be carried too far out of my immediate topic were I to demonstrate a point upon which I have repeatedly insisted, and which, with the poetical, stands not in the slightest need of demonstration—the point, I mean, that Beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem. A few words, however, in elucidation of my real meaning, which some of my friends have evinced a disposition to misrepresent. That pleasure which is at once the most intense, the most elevating, and the most pure, is, I believe, found in the contemplation of the beautiful.

When, indeed, men speak of Beauty, they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect—they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of *soul—not* of intellect, or of heart—upon which I have commented, and which is experienced in consequence of contemplating "the beautiful." Now I designate Beauty as the province of the poem, merely because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring from direct causes—that objects should be attained through means best adapted for their attainment—no one as yet having been weak enough to deny that the peculiar elevation alluded to is *most readily* attained in the poem. Now the object, Truth, or the satisfaction of the intellect, and the object Passion, or the excitement of the heart, are, although attainable, to a certain extent, in poetry, far more readily attainable in prose. Truth, in fact, demands a precision, and Passion, a *homeliness* (the truly passionate will comprehend me) which are absolutely antagonistic to that Beauty which, I maintain, is the excitement, or pleasurable elevation, of the soul. It by no means follows from anything here said, that passion, or even truth, may not be introduced, and even profitably introduced, into a poem—for they may serve in elucidation, or aid the general effect, as do discords in music, by contrast—but the true artist will always contrive, first, to tone them into proper subservience to the predominant aim, and, secondly, to enveil them, as far as possible, in that Beauty which is the atmosphere and the essence of the poem.

Regarding, then, Beauty as my province, my next question referred to the *tone* of its highest manifestation—and all experience has shown that this tone is

one of *sadness*. Beauty of whatever kind, in its supreme development, invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears. Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones.

The length, the province, and the tone, being thus determined, I betook myself to ordinary induction, with the view of obtaining some artistic piquancy which might serve me as a key-note in the construction of the poem—some pivot upon which the whole structure might turn. In carefully thinking over all the usual artistic effects—or more properly *points*, in the theatrical sense—I did not fail to perceive immediately that no one had been so universally employed as that of the *refrain*. The universality of its employment sufficed to assure me of its intrinsic value, and spared me the necessity of submitting it to analysis. I considered it, however, with regard to its susceptibility of improvement, and soon saw it to be in a primitive condition. As commonly used, the *refrain*, or burden, not only is limited to lyric verse, but depends for its impression upon the force of monotone—both in sound and thought. The pleasure is deduced solely from the sense of identity—of repetition. I resolved to diversify, and so vastly heighten, the effect, by adhering, in general, to the monotone of sound, while I continually varied that of thought: that is to say, I determined to produce continuously novel effects, by the variation *of the application* of the *refrain*—the *refrain* itself remaining, for the most part, unvaried.

These points being settled, I next bethought me of the *nature* of my *refrain*. Since its application was to be repeatedly varied, it was clear that the *refrain* itself must be brief, for there would have been an in-

surmountable difficulty in frequent variations of application in any sentence of length. In proportion to the brevity of the sentence, would, of course, be the facility of the variation. This led me at once to a single word as the best *refrain*.

The question now arose as to the *character* of the word. Having made up my mind to a *refrain*, the division of the poem into stanzas was, of course, a corollary: the *refrain* forming the close to each stanza. That such a close, to have force, must be sonorous and susceptible of protracted emphasis, admitted no doubt: and these considerations inevitably led me to the long *o* as the most sonorous vowel, in connection with *r* as the most producible consonant.

The sound of the *refrain* being thus determined, it became necessary to select a word embodying this sound, and at the same time in the fullest possible keeping with that melancholy which I had predetermined as the tone of the poem. In such a search it would have been absolutely impossible to overlook the word "Nevermore." In fact, it was the very first which presented itself.

The next *desideratum* was a pretext for the continuous use of the one word "nevermore." In observing the difficulty which I at once found in inventing a sufficiently plausible reason for its continuous repetition, I did not fail to perceive that this difficulty arose solely from the pre-assumption that the word was to be so continuously or monotonously spoken by *a human* being—I did not fail to perceive, in short, that the difficulty lay in the reconciliation of this monotony with the exercise of reason on the part of the creature repeating the word. Here, then, immediately arose the

idea of a *non*-reasoning creature capable of speech; and, very naturally, a parrot, in the first instance, suggested itself, but was superseded forthwith by a Raven, as equally capable of speech, and infinitely more in keeping with the intended *tone*.

I had now gone so far as the conception of a Raven —the bird of ill omen—monotonously repeating the one word, "Nevermore," at the conclusion of each stanza, in a poem of melancholy tone, and in length about one hundred lines. Now, never losing sight of the object *supremeness*, or perfection, at all points, I asked myself—"Of all melancholy topics, what, according to the *universal* understanding of mankind, is the *most* melancholy?" Death—was the obvious reply. "And when," I said, "is this most melancholy of topics most poetical?" From what I have already explained at some length, the answer, here also, is obvious—"When it most closely allies itself to *Beauty*: the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world—and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover."

I had now to combine the two ideas, of a lover lamenting his deceased mistress and a Raven continuously repeating the word "Nevermore"—I had to combine these, bearing in mind my design of varying, at every turn, the *application* of the word repeated; but the only intelligible mode of such combination is that of imagining the Raven employing the word in answer to the queries of the lover. And here it was that I saw at once the opportunity afforded for the effect on which I had been depending—that is to say, the effect of the *variation of application*. I saw that I could

make the first query propounded by the lover—the first query to which the Raven should reply "Nevermore"—that I could make this first query a commonplace one—the second less so—the third still less, and so on—until at length the lover, startled from his original *nonchalance* by the melancholy character of the word itself—by its frequent repetition—and by a consideration of the ominous reputation of the fowl that uttered it—is at length excited to superstition, and wildly propounds queries of a far different character—queries whose solution he has passionately at heart—propounds them half in superstition and half in that species of despair which delights in self-torture—propounds them not altogether because he believes in the prophetic or demoniac character of the bird (which, reason assures him, is merely repeating a lesson learned by rote) but because he experiences a phrenzied pleasure in so modeling his questions as to receive from the *expected* "Nevermore" the most delicious because the most intolerable of sorrow. Perceiving the opportunity thus afforded me—or, more strictly, thus forced upon me in the progress of the construction—I first established in mind the climax, or concluding query—that to which "Nevermore" should be in the last place an answer—that in reply to which this word "Nevermore" should involve the utmost conceivable amount of sorrow and despair.

Here then the poem may be said to have its beginning—at the end, where all works of art should begin—for it was here, at this point of my preconsiderations, that I first put pen to paper in the composition of the stanza:

"Prophet," said I, "thing of evil! prophet still if bird or devil!
By that heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore,
Tell this soul with sorrow laden, if within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."
Quoth the raven "Nevermore."

I composed this stanza, at this point, first that, by establishing the climax, I might the better vary and graduate, as regards seriousness and importance, the preceding queries of the lover—and, secondly, that I might definitely settle the rhythm, the metre, and the length and general arrangement of the stanza—as well as graduate the stanzas which were to precede, so that none of them might surpass this in rhythmical effect. Had I been able, in the subsequent composition, to construct more vigorous stanzas, I should, without scruple, have purposely enfeebled them, so as not to interfere with the climacteric effect.

And here I may as well say a few words of the versification. My first object (as usual) was originality. The extent to which this has been neglected, in versification, is one of the most unaccountable things in the world. Admitting that there is little possibility of variety in mere *rhythm*, it is still clear that the possible varieties of metre and stanza are absolutely infinite—and yet, *for centuries, no man, in verse, has ever done, or ever seemed to think of doing, an original thing.* The fact is, originality (unless in minds of very unusual force) is by no means a matter, as some suppose, of impulse or intuition. In general, to be found, it must be elaborately sought, and al-

though a positive merit of the highest class, demands in its attainment less of invention than negation.

Of course, I pretend to no originality in either the rhythm or metre of the "Raven." The former is trochlaic—the latter is octameter acatalectic, alternating with heptameter catalectic repeated in the *refrain* of the fifth verse, and terminating with tetrameter catalectic. Less pedantically—the feet employed throughout (trochees) consist of a long syllable followed by a short: the first line of the stanza consists of eight of these feet—the second of seven and a half (in effect two-thirds)—the third of eight—the fourth of seven and a half—the fifth the same—the sixth three and a half. Now, each of these lines, taken individually, has been employed before, and what originality the "Raven" has, is in their *combination into stanza*; nothing even remotely approaching this combination has ever been attempted. The effect of this originality of combination is aided by other unusual, and some altogether novel effects, arising from an extension of the application of the principles of rhyme and alliteration.

The next point to be considered was the mode of bringing together the lover and the Raven—and the first branch of this consideration was the *locale*. For this the most natural suggestion might seem to be a forest, or the fields—but it has always appeared to me that a close *circumscription of space* is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident:—it has the force of a frame to a picture. It has an indisputable moral power in keeping concentrated the attention, and, of course, must not be confounded with mere unity of place.

I determined, then, to place the lover in his chamber—in a chamber rendered sacred to him by memories of her who had frequented it. The room is represented as richly furnished—this in mere pursuance of the ideas I have already explained on the subject of Beauty, as the sole true poetical thesis.

The *locale* being thus determined, I had now to introduce the bird—and the thought of introducing him through the window, was inevitable. The idea of making the lover suppose, in the first instance, that the flapping of the wings of the bird against the shutter, is a "tapping" at the door, originated in a wish to increase, by prolonging, the reader's curiosity, and in a desire to admit the incidental effect arising from the lover's throwing open the door, finding all dark, and thence adopting the half-fancy that it was the spirit of his mistress that knocked.

I made the night tempestuous, first, to account for the Raven's seeking admission, and secondly, for the effect of contrast with the (physical) serenity within the chamber.

I made the bird alight on the bust of Pallas, also for the effect of contrast between the marble and the plumage—it being understood that the bust was absolutely *suggested* by the bird—the bust of *Pallas* being chosen, first, as most in keeping with the scholarship of the lover, and, secondly, for the sonorousness of the word, Pallas, itself.

About the middle of the poem, also, I have availed myself of the force of contrast, with a view of deepening the ultimate impression. For example, an air of the fantastic—approaching as nearly to the ludicrous

as was admissible—is given to the Raven's entrance. He comes in "with many a flirt and flutter."

Not the *least obeisance made he*—not a moment stopped or stayed he,
But with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door.

In the two stanzas which follow, the design is more obviously carried out:—

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling
By the *grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,*
"Though thy *crest be shorn and shaven,* thou," I said, "art sure no craven,
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the nightly shore—
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!"
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

Much I marvelled *this ungainly fowl* to hear discourse so plainly,
Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore;
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as "Nevermore."

The effect of the *dénouement* being thus provided for, I immediately drop the fantastic for a tone of the most profound seriousness:—this tone commencing in the stanza directly following the one last quoted, with the line,

But the Raven, sitting lonely on that placid bust, spoke only, etc.

From this epoch the lover no longer jests—no longer sees anything even of the fantastic in the Raven's demeanor. He speaks of him as a "grim,

ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore," and feels the "fiery eyes" burning into his "bosom's core." This revolution of thought, or fancy, on the lover's part, is intended to induce a similar one on the part of the reader—to bring the mind into a proper frame for the *dénouement*—which is now brought about as rapidly and as *directly* as possible.

With the *dénouement* proper—with the Raven's reply, "Nevermore," to the lover's final demand if he shall meet his mistress in another world—the poem, in its obvious phase, that of a simple narrative, may be said to have its completion. So far, everything is within the limits of the accountable—of the real. A raven, having learned by rote the single word "Nevermore," and having escaped from the custody of its owner, is driven at midnight, through the violence of a storm, to seek admission at a window from which a light still gleams—the chamber-window of a student, occupied half in poring over a volume, half in dreaming of a beloved mistress deceased. The casement being thrown open at the fluttering of the bird's wings, the bird itself perches on the most convenient seat out of the immediate reach of the student, who, amused by the incident and the oddity of the visitor's demeanor, demands of it, in jest and without looking for a reply, its name. The raven addressed, answers with its customary word, "Nevermore"—a word which finds immediate echo in the melancholy heart of the student, who, giving utterance aloud to certain thoughts suggested by the occasion, is again startled by the fowl's repetition of "Nevermore." The student now guesses the state of the case, but is impelled, as I have before explained, by the human thirst for self-torture, and in

part by superstition, to propound such queries to the bird as will bring him, the lover, the most of the luxury of sorrow, through the anticipated answer "Nevermore." With the indulgence, to the utmost extreme, of this self-torture, the narration, in what I have termed its first or obvious phase, has a natural termination, and so far there has been no overstepping of the limits of the real.

But in subjects so handled, however skilfully, or with however vivid an array of incident, there is always a certain hardness or nakedness, which repels the artistical eye. Two things are invariably required—first, some amount of complexity, or more properly, adaptation; and, secondly, some amount of suggestiveness—some undercurrent, however indefinite, of meaning. It is this latter, in especial, which imparts to a work of art so much of that *richness* (to borrow from colloquy a forcible term) which we are too fond of confounding with *the ideal.* It is the *excess* of the suggested meaning—it is the rendering this the upper instead of the undercurrent of the theme—which turns into prose (and that of the very flattest kind) the so-called poetry of the so-called transcendentalists.

Holding these opinions, I added the two concluding stanzas of the poem—their suggestiveness being thus made to pervade all the narrative which has preceded them. The undercurrent of meaning is rendered first apparent in the lines—

"Take thy beak from out *my heart,* and take thy form from off my door!"
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore!"

It will be observed that the words, "from out my heart," involve the first metaphorical expression in

the poem. They, with the answer, "Nevermore," dispose the mind to seek a moral in all that has been previously narrated. The reader begins now to regard the Raven as emblematical—but it is not until the very last line of the very last stanza, that the intention of making him emblematical of *Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance* is permitted distinctly to be seen:

> And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting,
> On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
> And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
> And the lamplight o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
> And my soul *from out that shadow* that lies floating on the floor
> Shall be lifted—nevermore.

A LONG POEM A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS

[From *The Poetic Principle,* first published in *Sartain's Union Magazine,* October, 1850, but delivered in public addresses as early as 1848 and embodied in still earlier literary criticisms. Bryant, by the way, adopted or at least held and practised Poe's doctrine of the short poem. "It seems to me," he says in the Introduction to his *Library of Poetry and Song* (1871), "that it is only poems of a moderate length, or else portions of the greater work to which I refer, that produce the effect upon the mind and heart which make the charm of this kind of writing." Of Bryant's one hundred and sixty poems the average length is seventy-five lines.]

In speaking of the Poetic Principle, I have no design to be either thorough or profound. While discussing, very much at random, the essentiality of what

we call Poetry, my principal purpose will be to cite for consideration, some few of those minor English or American poems which best suit my own taste, or which, upon my own fancy, have left the most definite impression. By "minor poems" I mean, of course, poems of little length. And here, in the beginning, permit me to say a few words in regard to a somewhat peculiar principle, which, whether rightfully or wrongfully, has always had its influence in my own critical estimate of the poem. I hold that a long poem does not exist. I maintain that the phrase, "a long poem," is simply a flat contradiction in terms.

I need scarcely observe that a poem deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites, by elevating the soul. The value of the poem is in the ratio of this elevating excitement. But all excitements are, through a psychal necessity, transient. That degree of excitement which would entitle a poem to be so called at all, cannot be sustained throughout a composition of any great length. After the lapse of half an hour, at the very utmost, it flags—fails—a revulsion ensues—and then the poem is, in effect, and in fact, no longer such.

There are, no doubt, many who have found difficulty in reconciling the critical dictum that the "Paradise Lost" is to be devoutly admired throughout, with the absolute impossibility of maintaining for it, during perusal, the amount of enthusiasm which that critical dictum would demand. This great work, in fact, is to be regarded as poetical, only when, losing sight of that vital requisite in all works of Art, Unity, we view it merely as a series of minor poems. If, to preserve its Unity—its totality of effect or impression—we read it (as would be necessary) at a single sitting, the result

is but a constant alternation of excitement and depression. After a passage of what we feel to be true poetry, there follows, inevitably, a passage of platitude which no critical pre-judgment can force us to admire; but if, upon completing the work, we read it again, omitting the first book—that is to say, commencing with the second—we shall be surprised at now finding that admirable which we before condemned—that damnable which we had previously so much admired. It follows from all this that the ultimate, aggregate, or absolute effect of even the best epic under the sun, is a nullity:—and this is precisely the fact.

In regard to the "Iliad," we have, if not positive proof, at least very good reason for believing it intended as a series of lyrics: but, granting the epic intention, I can say only that the work is based in an imperfect sense of art. The modern epic is, of the supposititious ancient model, but an inconsiderate and blind imitation. But the day of these artistic anomalies is over. If, at any time, any very long poem *were* popular in reality, which I doubt, it is at least clear that no very long poem will ever be popular again.

That the extent of a poetical work is, *ceteris paribus*, the measure of its merit, seems undoubtedly, when we thus state it, a proposition sufficiently absurd—yet we are indebted for it to the Quarterly Reviews. Surely there can be nothing in mere *size*, abstractly considered—there can be nothing in mere *bulk*, so far as a volume is concerned, which has so continuously elicited admiration from these saturnine pamphlets! A mountain, to be sure, by the mere sentiment of physical magnitude which it conveys, *does* impress us

with a sense of the sublime—but no man is impressed after *this* fashion by the material grandeur of even "The Columbiad." Even the Quarterlies have not instructed us to be so impressed by it. *As yet*, they have not *insisted* on our estimating Lamartine by the cubic foot, or Pollok by the pound—but what else are we to *infer* from their continual prating about "sustained effort?" If, by "sustained effort," any little gentleman has accomplished an epic, let us frankly commend him for the effort—if this indeed be a thing commendable—but let us forbear praising the epic on the effort's account. It is to be hoped that common sense, in the time to come, will prefer deciding upon a work of art, rather by the impression it makes, by the effect it produces, than by the time it took to impress the effect, or by the amount of "sustained effort" which had been found necessary in effecting the impression. The fact is, that perseverance is one thing, and genius quite another; nor can all the Quarterlies in Christendom confound them. By and by, this proposition, with many which I have been just urging, will be received as self-evident. In the meantime, by being generally condemned as falsities, they will not be essentially damaged as truths.

On the other hand, it is clear that a poem may be improperly brief. Undue brevity degenerates into mere epigrammatism. A *very* short poem, while now and then producing a brilliant or vivid, never produces a profound or enduring effect. There must be the steady pressing down of the stamp upon the wax. De Béranger has wrought innumerable things, pungent and spirit-stirring; but, in general, they have been too imponderous to stamp themselves deeply into the

public attention; and thus, as so many feathers of fancy, have been blown aloft only to be whistled down the wind.

THE HERESY OF THE DIDACTIC

[From *The Poetic Principle.* See the preceding extract. It must be understood that Poe uses "truth" in its moral or prudential or purely factual sense. No poem deserves the name that is not founded and arched in truth. But what kind of truth? Poe answers in *Eureka*: "The sense of the symmetrical is an instinct which may be depended upon with an almost blindfold reliance. It is the poetical essence of the Universe—of the Universe which, in the supremeness of its symmetry, is but the most sublime of poems. Now symmetry and consistency are convertible terms: —thus Poetry and Truth are one." See also the first paragraph of the third extract from *The Poetic Principle,* page 200.]

While the epic mania—while the idea that, to merit in poetry, prolixity is indispensable—has, for some years past, been gradually dying out of the public mind, by mere dint of its own absurdity—we find it succeeded by a heresy too palpably false to be long tolerated, but one which, in the brief period it has already endured, may be said to have accomplished more in the corruption of our Poetical Literature than all its other enemies combined. I allude to the heresy of *The Didactic.* It has been assumed, tacitly and avowedly, directly and indirectly, that the ultimate object of all Poetry is Truth. Every poem, it is said, should inculcate a moral; and by this moral is the poetical merit

of the work to be adjudged. We Americans, especially, have patronized this happy idea; and we Bostonians, very especially, have developed it in full. We have taken it into our heads that to write a poem simply for the poem's sake, and to acknowledge such to have been our design, would be to confess ourselves radically wanting in the true Poetic dignity and force:—but the simple fact is, that, would we but permit ourselves to look into our own souls, we should immediately there discover, that under the sun there neither exists nor *can* exist any work more thoroughly dignified—more supremely noble than this very poem—this poem *per se*—this poem which is a poem and nothing more—this poem written solely for the poem's sake.

With as deep a reverence for the True as ever inspired the bosom of man, I would, nevertheless, limit, in some measure, its modes of inculcation. I would limit to enforce them. I would not enfeeble them by dissipation. The demands of Truth are severe. She has no sympathy with the myrtles. All *that* which is so indispensable in Song, is precisely all *that* with which *she* has nothing whatever to do. It is but making her a flaunting paradox, to wreathe her in gems and flowers. In enforcing a truth, we need severity rather than efflorescence of language. We must be simple, precise, terse. We must be cool, calm, unimpassioned. In a word, we must be in that mood which, as nearly as possible, is the exact converse of the poetical. *He* must be blind, indeed, who does not perceive the radical and chasmal differences between the truthful and the poetical modes of inculcation. He must be theory-mad beyond redemption who, in spite

of these differences, shall still persist in attempting to reconcile the obstinate oils and waters of Poetry and Truth.

Dividing the world of mind into its three most immediately obvious distinctions, we have the Pure Intellect, Taste, and the Moral Sense. I place Taste in the middle, because it is just this position, which, in the mind, it occupies. It holds intimate relations with either extreme; but from the Moral Sense is separated by so faint a difference that Aristotle has not hesitated to place some of its operations among the virtues themselves. Nevertheless, we find the *offices* of the trio marked with a sufficient distinction. Just as the Intellect concerns itself with Truth, so Taste informs us of the Beautiful while the Moral Sense is regardful of Duty. Of this latter, while Conscience teaches the obligation, and Reason the expediency, Taste contents herself with displaying the charms:—waging war upon Vice solely on the ground of her deformity—her disproportion—her animosity to the fitting, to the appropriate, to the harmonious—in a word, to Beauty.

An immortal instinct, deep within the spirit of man, is thus, plainly, a sense of the Beautiful. This it is which administers to his delight in the manifold forms, and sounds, and odors, and sentiments amid which he exists. And just as the lily is repeated in the lake, or the eyes of Amaryllis in the mirror, so is the mere oral or written repetition of these forms, and sounds, and colors, and odors, and sentiments, a duplicate source of delight. But this mere repetition is not poetry. He who shall simply sing, with however glowing enthusiasm, or with however vivid a truth of description, of the sights, and sounds, and odors, and colors, and

sentiments, which greet *him* in common with all mankind—he, I say, has yet failed to prove his divine title. There is still a something in the distance which he has been unable to attain. We have still a thirst unquenchable, to allay which he has not shown us the crystal springs. This thirst belongs to the immortality of Man. It is at once a consequence and an indication of his perennial existence. It is the desire of the moth for the star. It is no mere appreciation of the Beauty before us—but a wild effort to reach the Beauty above. Inspired by an ecstatic pre-science of the glories beyond the grave, we struggle, by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time, to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertain to eternity alone. And thus when by Poetry—or when by Music, the most entrancing of the Poetic moods—we find ourselves melted into tears—we weep then—not as the Abbate Gravina supposes—through excess of pleasure, but through a certain, petulant, impatient sorrow at our inability to grasp *now*, wholly, here on earth, at once and for ever, those divine and rapturous joys, of which *through* the poem, or *through* the music, we attain to but brief and indeterminate glimpses.

The struggle to apprehend the supernal Loveliness —this struggle, on the part of souls fittingly constituted—has given to the world all *that* which it (the world) has ever been enabled at once to understand and *to feel* as poetic.

The Poetic Sentiment, of course, may develop itself in various modes—in Painting, in Sculpture, in Architecture, in the Dance—very especially in Music—and very peculiarly, and with a wide field, in the compo-

sition of the Landscape Garden. Our present theme, however, has regard only to its manifestation in words. And here let me speak briefly on the topic of rhythm. Contenting myself with the certainty that Music, in its various modes of metre, rhythm, and rhyme, is of so vast a moment in Poetry as never to be wisely rejected—is so vitally important an adjunct, that he is simply silly who declines its assistance, I will not now pause to maintain its absolute essentiality. It is in Music, perhaps, that the soul most nearly attains the great end for which, when inspired by the Poetic Sentiment, it struggles—the creation of supernal Beauty. It *may* be, indeed, that here this sublime end is, now and then, attained *in fact*. We are often made to feel, with a shivering delight, that from an earthly harp are stricken notes which *cannot* have been unfamiliar to the angels. And thus there can be little doubt that in the union of Poetry with Music in its popular sense, we shall find the widest field for the Poetic development. The old Bards and Minnesingers had advantages which we do not possess—and Thomas Moore, singing his own songs, was, in the most legitimate manner, perfecting them as poems.

To recapitulate, then:—I would define, in brief, the Poetry of words as *The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty*. Its sole arbiter is Taste. With the Intellect or with the Conscience, it has only collateral relations. Unless incidentally, it has no concern whatever either with Duty or with Truth.

A few words, however, in explanation. *That* pleasure which is at once the most pure, the most elevating, and the most intense, is derived, I maintain, from the contemplation of the Beautiful. In the con-

templation of Beauty we alone find it possible to attain that pleasurable elevation, or excitement, *of the soul*, which we recognize as the Poetic Sentiment, and which is so easily distinguished from Truth, which is the satisfaction of the Reason, or from Passion, which is the excitement of the heart. I make Beauty, therefore—using the word as inclusive of the sublime—I make Beauty the province of the poem, simply because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring as directly as possible from their causes:—no one as yet having been weak enough to deny that the peculiar elevation in question is at least *most readily* attainable in the poem. It by no means follows, however, that the incitements of Passion, or the precepts of Duty, or even the lessons of Truth, may not be introduced into a poem, and with advantage; for they may subserve, incidentally, in various ways, the general purposes of the work:—but the true artist will always contrive to tone them down in proper subjection to that *Beauty* which is the atmosphere and the real essence of the poem.

POETICAL THEMES

[From *The Poetic Principle.* See the two preceding extracts. Note in the last paragraph how Poe analyzes beauty into the five-fold appeal of sight, sound, odor, character, and woman. The two paragraphs form a model of effective conclusion. Both are recapitulatory; but the first is abstract—the second concrete. The second, moreover, not only recapitulates and expands, but enforces the main thesis by an appeal that is itself a culminating example of the beauty and psychic elevation with which the essay deals.]

Thus, although in a very cursory and imperfect manner, I have endeavored to convey to you my conception of the Poetic Principle. It has been my purpose to suggest that, while this Principle itself is, strictly and simply, the Human Aspiration for Supernal Beauty,' the manifestation of the Principle is always found in *an elevating excitement of the Soul*—quite independent of that passion which is the intoxication of the Heart—or of that Truth which is the satisfaction of the Reason. For, in regard to Passion, alas! its tendency is to degrade, rather than to elevate the Soul. Love, on the contrary—Love—the true, the divine Eros—the Uranian, as distinguished from the Dionæan Venus—is unquestionably the purest and truest of all poetical themes. And in regard to Truth —if, to be sure, through the attainment of a truth, we are led to perceive a harmony where none was apparent before, we experience, at once, the true poetical effect—but this effect is referable to the harmony alone, and not in the least degree to the truth which merely served to render the harmony manifest.

We shall reach, however, more immediately a distinct conception of what the true Poetry is, by mere reference to a few of the simple elements which induce in the Poet himself the true poetical effect. He recognizes the ambrosia which nourishes his soul, in the bright orbs that shine in Heaven—in the volutes of the flower—in the clustering of low shrubberies—in the waving of the grain-fields—in the slanting of tall, Eastern trees—in the blue distance of mountains—in the grouping of clouds—in the twinkling of half-hidden brooks—in the gleaming of silver rivers—in the repose of sequestered lakes—in the star-mirroring

depths of lonely wells. He perceives it in the songs of birds—in the harp of Æolus—in the sighing of the night-wind—in the repining voice of the forest—in the surf that complains to the shore—in the fresh breath of the woods—in the scent of the violet—in the voluptuous perfume of the hyacinth—in the suggestive odor that comes to him, at eventide, from far-distant, undiscovered islands, over dim oceans, illimitable and unexplored. He owns it in all noble thoughts—in all unworldly motives—in all holy impulses—in all chivalrous, generous, and self-sacrificing deeds. He feels it in the beauty of woman—in the grace of her step—in the lustre of her eye—in the melody of her voice—in her soft laughter—in her sigh—in the harmony of the rustling of her robes. He deeply feels it in her winning endearments—in her burning enthusiasms—in her gentle charities—in her meek and devotional endurances—but above all—ah, far above all —he kneels to it—he worships it in the faith, in the purity, in the strength, in the altogether divine majesty—of her *love*.

CHAPTER IV

The Poet

I

In Poe's *Philosophy of Composition* he barely mentions two details of technique that are as central in his art as any two that he discusses. You remember that the lover in *The Raven* first hears a rapping, that he thinks it is at the door, that he throws open the door, that he then thinks the rapping is at his window, and that only in the seventh stanza is the mystery solved and the Raven admitted. This delay, says Poe, "originated in a wish to increase, by prolonging, the reader's curiosity." He might have added that in every story that he had written the same psychology is in evidence. A mystery is about to be cleared up, a discovery is about to be made, a crime is about to be committed, but the final happening is preceded by a skilfully laid series of approximations. Not only does Poe thus "increase, by prolonging, the reader's curiosity;" he so intensifies the reader's suspense that the ultimate happening is not only a satisfaction to the intellect but a balm to the feelings. In *A Descent Into the Maelström* Poe says: "We careered round and round for perhaps an hour, flying rather than floating, getting gradually more and more into the middle of the surge, and then nearer and nearer to its horrible inner edge." Poe is the artist of the proximate on its way to the ultimate.

He is also and equally the artist of repetition in the service of melody and rhythm, but the subject is almost ignored in *The Philosophy of Composition* except in the brief references made to the refrain. In the selection that we have called *Repetition An Aid to Quaintness* Poe at least makes it clear that his own employment of repetition must have been conscious and studied. As early as 1827 he published a *Song* which begins,

> I saw thee on thy bridal day,
> When a burning blush came o'er thee,
> Though happiness around thee lay,
> The world all love before thee,

and ends,

> Who saw thee on that bridal day,
> When that deep blush *would* come o'er thee,
> Though happiness around thee lay,
> The world all love before thee.

But Poe's distinctive employment of repetition, the use of it which he has made peculiarly his own, is exemplified neither in the refrain nor in the recurrence of an initial stanza in the terminal stanza. There are few lyric poets of any time who have not freely employed both of these devices. Nor does Poe's insistence on "quaintness" make his own practice any the clearer. No one has ever found quaintness a marked characteristic of Poe's poetry, though repetition is plainly the chief characteristic of the form of his verse. I can detect no quaintness in these wonderful lines:

> To the glory that was Greece,
> And the grandeur that was Rome,

or in the magic of this stanza:

And all my days are trances,
And all my nightly dreams
Are where thy grey eye glances,
And where thy footstep gleams—
In what ethereal dances,
By what eternal streams.

I find instead a parallelism of structure which is a kind of repetition, a kind that Poe summoned to his service whenever harmony demanded it.

But repetition of structural units is not the distinctive note of Poe's verse. Structural repetition is a form of balanced and ordered utterance that is as old as song itself. The ultimate Poe differential is seen not in the repetition of clausal or phrasal patterns but in the repetition of the same or nearly the same thought in the same or nearly the same words. These lines are illustrations, but there is no quaintness in them:

For no ripples curl, alas!
Along that wilderness of glass—
No swellings tell that winds may be
Upon some far-off happier sea—
No heavings hint that winds have been
On seas less hideously serene.

Till the fair and gentle Eulalie became my blushing bride—
Till the yellow-haired young Eulalie became my smiling bride.

As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
"'Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door—
Only this and nothing more."

The skies they were ashen and sober;
The leaves they were crisped and sere—
The leaves they were withering and sere.

It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,
In the misty mid region of Weir—
It was down by the dank tarn of Auber,
In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

Whatever the effect aimed at, the effect actually produced is that of a subtler melody, a richer harmony, a more centralized rhythm. Repetition in Poe's hands is not a means of emphasizing thought; it is a means rather of lulling thought asleep to music. Crooning takes the place of creating. The thought as thought seems to pause, the repetition throbbing on like the accompaniment to a song heard between the pauses of the singer. Unity of mood, totality of effect, a dreamy sort of "indefinitiveness," wrought out by means perfectly definite and adapted,—these constitute the Poe differential. Others had used the same sort of repetition but not as Poe used it. With him it was less an occasional artifice than an habitual art.

After all, however, repetition is of the very essence of rhythm and harmony. It is not an eddy in the current; it is the current itself deepened and less obstructed. It is not something added from without; it is an enlargement and enrichment from within. All rhythm is repetition. In poetry there is first the recurrence of definitely numbered and definitely ordered feet, then of lines, then of terminal or interior rimes, till the stanza, a symphony of antiphonal repetitions, emerges complete. Then the march begins, stanza following stanza, line-length playing to line-length, rime answering to rime, and perhaps a terminal refrain summarizing and projecting the melody of the whole. But to Poe's ear this was not enough. He diffused other repetitions through his stanzas, and these repetitions not only made each stanza a more musical unit in itself but linked stanza to stanza in an unbroken strain of marching music unheard till then but heard

continuously since then. "Poe has proved himself," says Gosse, "to be the Piper of Hamelin to all later English poets. From Tennyson to Austin Dobson there is hardly one whose verse music does not show traces of Poe's influence." Saintsbury calls him "the greatest master of original prosodic effects that the United States has produced." No extraneous element was added, however, rhythmic repetition being only a continuation and multiplication of the central principle of verse in all languages. Poe did not manufacture a new artifice; he discovered and released an old resource.

Where did he get the suggestion for this kind of repetition? Not from Coleridge, not from any author or authors, but more probably from the ballad. The ballad is the product of communal composition and its distinctive formal characteristic is repetition. No other type of literature, ancient or modern, approaches the old English and Scottish folk-song in the consistent and effective use of repetition not only as a *bindemittel* within the stanza but as a pontoon from stanza to stanza. Poe's best known poems, Goethe's *Erlkönig*, Bürger's *Lenore*, Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, and Longfellow's *Wreck of the Hesperus* belong together. The same kind of repetition is employed in each, the same tone gives unity to each, the same air of mystery broods about each, and the same effect, though not to the same degree, is produced by each. They are all ballads and they all hark back to the ballad revival signalized by the appearance, in 1775, of Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. But more of the three hundred and five English and Scottish ballads have been found surviving by oral

tradition in Virginia than in any other state. And it is not improbable that Poe heard some of these ballads sung during his more impressionable years in Richmond, and in Albemarle County, for they are still sung by white and black, by old and young, and with all the old haunting refrains and reduplicate repetitions that make them unforgettable when once heard.

But if he did not hear them sung, he at least knew them from books and from the imitations that were built upon them or woven around them. The only other kind of song that shares with the ballad the resources of multiform repetition is the religious folk-song of the negro as sung on the plantations, in the homes, and in the tobacco factories of the South. A southerner can hardly help believing that the crooning lullabies, the plantation melodies, the labor songs of the negro slaves were at least subsidiary sources of Poe's lyrical technique. In matter and manner, in the waning of thought and the correspondent waxing of music, in the willingness of each sentence to merge its individuality into the larger life of the stanza and the self-sacrifice of the stanza in behalf of a still larger and more exigent totality, the resemblance between the two is insistently close. But whatever the source, Poe's poems are not to be construed as isolated and unrelated products. They are ballads in form, in spirit, and in effect, though the form has been diversified, the spirit etherealized, and the effect heightened. To know them, the best avenue of approach is the ballad; and to enrich your knowledge of the ballad, the best angle of retrospect is the poetry of Poe.

Another problem relates not to the form or source of Poe's verse but to the themes that he elected to

treat. Are his poems consistent exemplars of the beauty which, as a critic, Poe held to be the only true goal of the poet? Woodberry, speaking of our greater writers, says:[1] "They were concerned not with the apparent, but the real; not with the transitory, but the eternal; and, excepting Poe, they were all artists of the beautiful." This is a grave and strange indictment. If it is true, Poe preached one thing and practised another. The consensus of world opinion, moreover, has been unaccountably at fault if through all the years it has thought that it saw beauty and heard beauty and felt beauty where there was no beauty but only a sham pretense. If Poe was not an artist of the beautiful, what was he an artist of? The prompt and superficial answer is, He was an artist of death. Does he not say, "The death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world"? And are not his poems uniform illustrations of this thesis? Yes; but whatever his topic, Poe's theme is none the less beauty. Death, decay, separation are not his themes. They are only the occasions when beauty, in flight or about to take its flight, is felt to be most beautiful; when love, looking upon us for the last time, turns our love into adoration. "Nevermore" is not only the refrain of *The Raven,* it was not only a word that loomed terrible and menacing in Poe's thought, it was a doom under the shadow of which beauty and love seemed suddenly not of this world but visitants recalled.

If Poe's central theme needs any defence, it may be found in Browning:

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[1] *America in Literature* (1903), p. 220.

'Tis only when they spring to heaven that angels
Reveal themselves to you; they sit all day
Beside you, and lie down at night by you
Who care not for their presence, muse or sleep,
And all at once they leave you, and you know them!

If Browning needs reenforcement, it may be found in Shakespeare:

The setting sun, and music at the close,
As the last taste of sweets, is sweetest last,
Writ in remembrance more than things long past.

II

In his famous *Preface to the Poems* of 1845 Poe writes:

"These trifles are collected and republished chiefly with a view to their redemption from the many improvements to which they have been subjected while going 'the rounds of the press.' I am naturally anxious that if what I have written is to circulate at all, it should circulate as I wrote it. In defence of my own taste, nevertheless, it is incumbent on me to say that I think nothing in this volume of much value to the public, or very creditable to myself. Events not to be controlled have prevented me from making, at any time, any serious effort in what, under happier circumstances, would have been the field of my choice. With me poetry has been not a purpose, but a passion; and the passions should be held in reverence; they must not—they cannot at will be excited with an eye to the paltry compensations, or the more paltry commendations, of mankind."

Poe, it may be added, was a ceaseless reviser of the text of his poems, and his revisions were uniformly

improvements.[2] The texts that follow are those that seem to have received the poet's latest authorization.

TO HELEN (1831)

["The grace and symmetry of the outline," wrote Lowell, "are such as few poets ever attain. There is a smack of ambrosia about it." Hardly a note of dissent breaks the chorus of praise that has greeted this crystalline lyric. Of all Poe's poems, this, I think, would receive the vote for first place among English-speaking critics, while *Ulalume* would receive first award among French critics. It has been said that the highest praise ever paid a woman by a *littérateur* was Steele's tribute to Lady Elizabeth Hastings: "To love her was a liberal education." Against this I should confidently pit Poe's second stanza with the wide vistas that open in its two concluding lines. "Nicéan" is probably a vague reference to Milton's "Nyseian isle" (*Paradise Lost*, IV, 1, 275). We know what Poe meant by "hyacinth hair" from a passage in *Ligeia*: see page 248.]

Helen, thy beauty is to me
  Like those Nicéan barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
  The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
  To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,
  Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
  To the glory that was Greece,
  And the grandeur that was Rome.

Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche
  How statue-like I see thee stand,
The agate lamp within thy hand!
  Ah, Psyche, from the regions which
  Are Holy-Land!

[2]The number and minuteness of these revisions were not realized until Killis Campbell tracked and recorded them in his standard edition of *The Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (1917.)

ISRAFEL (1831)

And the angel Israfel [whose heart-strings are a lute, and] who has the sweetest voice of all God's creatures.—KORAN. But the bracketed words are Poe's insertion to make the text fit the poem.

[The sub-title might well be phrased "The Influence of Environment on the Poet." The last stanza is Poe's *apologia*. Certainly this stanza would make a better epitaph for a Poe monument than that suggested by Longfellow,

> And the fever called "Living"
> Is conquered at last,

from the poem *For Annie*. Nowhere else in Poe's writings is there so violent an inversion of the normal order of words as in

> But the skies that angel trod,

for

> But that angel trod the skies.]

In Heaven a spirit doth dwell
  Whose heart-strings are a lute;
None sing so wildly well
As the angel Israfel,
And the giddy stars (so legends tell)
Ceasing their hymns, attend the spell
  Of his voice, all mute.

Tottering above
  In her highest noon,
  The enamoured moon
Blushes with love,
  While, to listen, the red levin
  (With the rapid Pleiads, even,
  Which were seven)
  Pauses in Heaven.

And they say (the starry choir
  And the other listening things)
That Israfeli's fire
Is owing to that lyre
  By which he sits and sings—
The trembling living wire
  Of those unusual strings.

But the skies that angel trod,
Where deep thoughts are a duty—
Where Love's a grown-up God—
Where the Houri glances are
Imbued with all the beauty
Which we worship in a star.

Therefore, thou art not wrong,
Israfeli, who despisest
An unimpassioned song;
To thee the laurels belong,
Best bard, because the wisest!
Merrily live, and long!

The ecstasies above
With thy burning measures suit—
Thy grief, thy joy, thy hate, thy love,
With the fervour of thy lute—
Well may the stars be mute!

Yes, Heaven is thine; but this
Is a world of sweets and sours;
Our flowers are merely—flowers,
And the shadow of thy perfect bliss
Is the sunshine of ours.

If I could dwell
Where Israfel
Hath dwelt, and he where I,
He might not sing so wildly well
A mortal melody,
While a bolder note than this might swell
From my lyre within the sky.

THE CITY IN THE SEA (1831)

[This is the beginning in Poe's verse of ruin from within, and also of the kind of repetition that was to become increasingly characteristic. The doom of Babylon has influenced the picture: see *Revelation* XVI, XVII, XVIII, XX, and *Isaiah* XIV. I do not think, however, that in its present final form the poem was meant to express the damnation of the wicked but rather the dethronement of Death himself and the passing of his kingdom. See *Revelation* XX, 14.]

Lo! Death has reared himself a throne
In a strange city lying alone
Far down within the dim West,
Where the good and the bad and the worst and the best
Have gone to their eternal rest.
There shrines and palaces and towers
(Time-eaten towers that tremble not!)
Resemble nothing that is ours.
Around, by lifting winds forgot,
Resignedly beneath the sky
The melancholy waters lie.

No rays from the holy heaven come down
On the long night-time of that town;
But light from out the lurid sea
Streams up the turrets silently—
Gleams up the pinnacles far and free—
Up domes—up spires—up kingly halls—
Up fanes—up Babylon-like walls—
Up shadowy long-forgotten bowers
Of sculptured ivy and stone flowers—
Up many and many a marvellous shrine
Whose wreathéd friezes intertwine
The viol, the violet, and the vine.
Resignedly beneath the sky
The melancholy waters lie.
So blend the turrets and shadows there
That all seem pendulous in air,
While from a proud tower in the town
Death looks gigantically down.

There open fanes and gaping graves
Yawn level with the luminous waves;
But not the riches there that lie
In each idol's diamond eye,—
Not the gaily-jeweled dead,
Tempt the waters from their bed;
For no ripples curl, alas,
Along that wilderness of glass;
No swellings tell that winds may be
Upon some far-off happier sea;
No heavings hint that winds have been
On seas less hideously serene!

But lo, a stir is in the air!
The wave—there is a movement there!
As if the towers had thrust aside,
In slightly sinking, the dull tide—
As if their tops had feebly given
A void within the filmy Heaven.

The waves have now a redder glow—
The hours are breathing faint and low—
And when, amid no earthly moans,
Down, down that town shall settle hence,
Hell, rising from a thousand thrones,
Shall do it reverence.

THE COLISEUM (1833)

[If the judges had not been unwilling to award both honors to the same contestant, this poem would have won the fifty dollar prize when *The MS. Found in a Bottle* won the hundred dollar prize offered by the Baltimore *Saturday Morning Visitor.* See page 2. Though written in blank verse—a meter used only three times by Poe as a lyric measure—the poem is divided into sections that correspond to the paragraphs of prose. In the last section, ruin, vanished power, and departed glory find their elect interpreter.]

Type of the antique Rome! Rich reliquary
Of lofty contemplation left to Time
By buried centuries of pomp and power!
At length—at length—after so many days
Of weary pilgrimage and burning thirst
(Thirst for the springs of lore that in thee lie),
I kneel, an altered and an humble man,
Amid thy shadows, and so drink within
My very soul thy grandeur, gloom, and glory!

Vastness! and Age! and Memories of Eld!
Silence! and Desolation! and dim Night!
I feel ye now—I feel ye in your strength—
O spells more sure than e'er Judæan king
Taught in the gardens of Gethsemane!
O charms more potent than the rapt Chaldee
Ever drew down from out the quiet stars!

Here, where a hero fell, a column falls!
Here, where the mimic eagle glared in gold,
A midnight vigil holds the swarthy bat!
Here, where the dames of Rome their gilded hair
Waved to the wind, now wave the reed and thistle!

Here, where on golden throne the monarch lolled,
Glides, spectre-like, unto his marble home,
Lit by the wan light of the horned moon,
The swift and silent lizard of the stones!

But stay! these walls—these ivy-clad arcades—
These mouldering plinths—these sad and blackened shafts—
These vague entablatures—this crumbling frieze—
These shattered cornices—this wreck—this ruin—
These stones—alas! these grey stones—are they all—
All of the famed and the colossal left
By the corrosive Hours to Fate and me?

"Not all"—the Echoes answer me—"not all!
Prophetic sounds and loud, arise forever
From us, and from all Ruin, unto the wise,
As melody from Memnon to the Sun.
We rule the hearts of mightiest men—we rule
With a despotic sway all giant minds.
We are not impotent—we pallid stones.
Not all our power is gone—not all our fame—
Not all the magic of our high renown—
Not all the wonder that encircles us—
Not all the mysteries that in us lie—
Not all the memories that hang upon
And cling around about us as a garment,
Clothing us in a robe of more than glory."

TO ONE IN PARADISE (1834)

[The refrain of *The Raven* may be glimpsed through a translucent rather than transparent veil in the thrice repeated "no more" of these lines and in the recurrence of the same words in the *Sonnet—To Zante* (1837) and the *Sonnet—Silence* (1840). The poem occurs in the short story called *The Assignation*. Four years after Poe's death, he was accused of purloining the lines from Tennyson, but the laureate promptly set the matter right.]

Thou wast all that to me, love,
  For which my soul did pine—
A green isle in the sea, love,
  A fountain and a shrine,
All wreathed with fairy fruits and flowers,
  And all the flowers were mine.

Ah, dream too bright to last!
  Ah, starry Hope! that didst arise
But to be overcast!
  A voice from out the Future cries,
"On! on!"—but o'er the Past
  (Dim gulf!) my spirit hovering lies
Mute, motionless, aghast.

For, alas! alas! with me
  The light of Life is o'er!
  "No more—no more—no more—"
(Such language holds the solemn sea
  To the sands upon the shore)
Shall bloom the thunder-blasted tree,
  Or the stricken eagle soar!

And all my days are trances,
  And all my nightly dreams
Are where thy grey eye glances,
  And where thy footstep gleams—
In what ethereal dances,
  By what eternal streams.

THE HAUNTED PALACE (1839)

[This poem, called by Poe a ballad, was an impromptu of the hero in *The Fall of the House of Usher* and, as Lowell says, "loses greatly by being taken out of its rich and appropriate setting." To call it a self-portraiture of Poe is to deal flagrantly with both literature and life. "By *The Haunted Palace,*" said Poe, "I mean to imply a mind haunted by phantoms—a disordered brain." Poe's poem was published in April, 1839, and Longfellow's *Beleaguered City* in the following November. The charge of plagiarism which Poe promptly brought is not borne out by a comparison of the form or content of the two poems.]

In the greenest of our valleys
  By good angels tenanted,
Once a fair and stately palace—
  Radiant palace—reared its head.
In the monarch Thought's dominion—
  It stood there!
Never seraph spread a pinion
  Over fabric half so fair!

Banners yellow, glorious, golden,
On its roof did float and flow
(This—all this—was in the olden
Time long ago),
And every gentle air that dallied,
In that sweet day,
Along the ramparts plumed and pallid,
A wingéd odour went away.

Wanderers in that happy valley,
Through two luminous windows, saw
Spirits moving musically,
To a lute's well-tunéd law,
Round about a throne where, sitting,
(Porphyrogene!)
In state his glory well befitting,
The ruler of the realm was seen.

And all with pearl and ruby glowing
Was the fair palace door,
Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing
And sparkling evermore,
A troop of Echoes, whose sweet duty
Was but to sing,
In voices of surpassing beauty,
The wit and wisdom of their king.

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
Assailed the monarch's high estate.
(Ah, let us mourn!—for never morrow
Shall dawn upon him desolate!)
And round about his home the glory
That blushed and bloomed,
Is but a dim-remembered story
Of the old time entombed.

And travellers, now, within that valley,
Through the red-litten windows see
Vast forms, that move fantastically
To a discordant melody,
While, like a ghastly rapid river,
Through the pale door
A hideous throng rush out forever
And laugh—but smile no more.

THE CONQUEROR WORM (1843)

[Before interpreting this tragedy in five acts as Poe's philosophy of life, recall the circumstances of its

composition. It was published in 1843 and incorporated in *Ligeia* when the latter story was republished in *The Broadway Journal* of September 27, 1845. The first edition of *Ligeia,* that of 1838, contained, instead of *The Conqueror Worm* and the paragraph that precedes it as well as the two paragraphs that follow it, these words: "Methinks I again behold the terrible struggles of her lofty, her nearly idealized nature, with the might and the terror and the majesty of the great Shadow. But she perished. The giant *will* succumbed to a power more stern. And I thought, as I gazed upon the corpse, of the wild passage in Joseph Glanvill. 'The will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield him to the angels, *nor unto death utterly,* save only through the weakness of his feeble will.'" This is not a strong passage, not strong enough for the strategic position that it occupies in the story. Poe determines to remodel it. Instead of representing Ligeia's enemy, death, as a shadow, he will represent it as the worm that dieth not. Both symbols are biblical but the latter is far more concrete and poignant. And poetry is better suited to its vivid and immemorial staging than prose. In the meanwhile Poe had read and commended, in June, 1840, a poem by one Spencer Wallace Cone, containing the lines,

> Spread o'er his rigid form
> The banner of his pride,
> And let him meet *the conqueror worm*
> With his good sword by his side.

He now builds his substitute poem around the new symbol but builds it as the work of Ligeia, "composed

by herself not many days before." The poem represents Ligeia's nadir of hopelessness, against which she protests in impassioned prayer and with unconquerable will. The whole story is planned to give the lie to the materialism and hopeless finality of *The Conqueror Worm.* See *Ligeia,* page 254.]

Lo! 'tis a gala night
Within the lonesome latter years!
An angel throng, bewinged, bedight
In veils, and drowned in tears,
Sit in a theatre, to see
A play of hopes and fears,
While the orchestra breathes fitfully
The music of the spheres.

Mimes, in the form of God on high,
Mutter and mumble low,
And hither and thither fly—
Mere puppets they, who come and go
At bidding of vast formless things
That shift the scenery to and fro,
Flapping from out their Condor wings
Invisible Woe!

That motley drama—oh, be sure
It shall not be forgot!
With its Phantom chased for evermore,
By a crowd that seize it not,
Through a circle that ever returneth in
To the self-same spot,
And much of Madness, and more of Sin,
And Horror the soul of the plot.

But see, amid the mimic rout
A crawling shape intrude!
A blood-red thing that writhes from out
The scenic solitude!
It writhes!—it writhes!—with mortal pangs
The mimes become its food,
And seraphs sob at vermin fangs
In human gore imbued.

Out—out are the lights—out all!
And, over each quivering form,
The curtain, a funeral pall,
Comes down with the rush of a storm,

While the angels, all pallid and wan,
Uprising, unveiling, affirm
That the play is the tragedy, "Man,"
And its hero the Conqueror Worm.

THE RAVEN (1845)

[When *The Raven* was first published in the New York *Evening Mirror* for January 29, 1845, from advance sheets of *The American Whig Review,* N. P. Willis, the editor, introduced it by the following note: "We are permitted to copy (in advance of publication), from the second number of the 'American Review,' the following remarkable poem by Edgar Poe. In our opinion, it is the most effective single example of 'fugitive poetry' ever published in this country; and unsurpassed in English poetry for subtle conception, masterly ingenuity of versification, and consistent sustaining of imaginative lift . . . It is one of those 'dainties bred in a book,' which we feed on. It will stick to the memory of everybody who reads it." J. H. Ingram, Poe's English biographer, summarizes the later consensus of opinion when he calls *The Raven* "the most popular lyrical poem in the world." The charge of mere artifice will not hold. "Que l' on ne dise pas trop haut, toutefois," says Lauvrière, "que l' art l' emporte ici sur l' inspiration et l' artifice même sur l' art. Non, il suffit de lire la traduction, si impuissante qu' elle soit, pour voir qu' à la magie des mots survit pleinement le sens pathétique" (*Edgar Poe* in *Écrivains Étrangers,* 1911, p. 217). But beware of reading "remorse" into *The Raven,* as so many platform interpreters have done. Even Gosse speaks of Poe's "remorseful passion for the irrecoverable dead." There is not a scintilla of remorse in Poe's poetry.

The Raven embodies not remorse but the universal protest of the soul against the denial of immortality. As Poe sometimes celebrates beauty *via* decay, so here he celebrates faith *via* doubt. For the other side of the shield, see I *Corinthians* 15. That Poe believed in the immortality of the soul is evident from many assertions made during his lifetime and especially from the final and victorious affirmation of *Eureka*: see pages 68, 72. Turn also to *The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion* (pages 305-312), *The Colloquy of Monos and Una* (pages 320-333), and *The Power of Words* (pages 333, 339), in each of which the dead lovers are happily re-united in the other world. For *The Raven* in prospect and retrospect, read again *Defects in the Technique of Barnaby Rudge* (page 140)] and *The Technique of the Raven* (pages 173-190). You will find an interesting analogy to the ascending questions put by the lover in *The Raven*—but nothing more than an analogy—in the two famous ballads, *Lord Randal* and *Edward*.]

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
"'Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door—
Only this and nothing more."

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow
From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
Nameless *here* for evermore.

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating
"'Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door—
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—
This it is and nothing more."

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
"Sir," said I, "or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you"—here I opened wide the door;—
Darkness there and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, "Lenore!"
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word "Lenore!"
Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.
"Surely," said I, "surely that is something at my window lattice;
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore—
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;—
'Tis the wind and nothing more!"

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore.
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door—
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door—
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
"Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art sure no craven,
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore—
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!"
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore;
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as "Nevermore."

But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.
Nothing farther then he uttered—not a feather then he fluttered—
Till I scarcely more than muttered, "Other friends have flown before—
On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my hopes have flown before."
Then the bird said "Nevermore."

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
"Doubtless," said I, "what it utters is its only stock and store
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore—
Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore
Of 'Never—nevermore.'"

But the Raven still beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird, and bust and door;
Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore—
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore
Meant in croaking "Nevermore."

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;
This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining
On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o'er,
But whose velvet violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o'er,
She shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.
"Wretch," I cried, "thy God hath lent thee—by these angels he hath sent thee
Respite—respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore;
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!"
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! prophet still, if bird or devil!—
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted—
On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—
Is there—*is* there balm in Gilead?—tell me—tell me, I implore!"
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

"Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!" I shrieked, upstarting—
"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!
Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!"
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted—nevermore!

ULALUME—A BALLAD (1847)

["It is not, however, in *The Bells* or in *The Raven*, marvellous as are these *tours de force*, that we see the essential greatness of Poe revealed," says Gosse. "The best of his poems are those in which he deals less boisterously with the sentiment of mystery. During the last months of his unhappy life, he composed three lyrics which, from a technical point of view, must be regarded not only as the most interesting which he wrote, but as those which have had the most permanent effect upon subsequent literature, not only in England merely, but in France."] These are *Ulalume, Annabel Lee, For Annie"* (*Contemporary Review*, February, 1909. The article is reprinted in *Some Diversions of a Man of Letters*, 1919). *"Ulalume,"* says Louis P. Betz, one of the best German students of Poe, "is nothing less than the masterpiece of the new symbolic poetry, especially to the younger generation opposed to Zola" (*Studien zur vergleichenden Literatur-geschichte der neueren Zeit*, 1902). The simplest interpretation of the poem is the best: It is the anniversary night of the burial of Mrs. Poe. The poet is in communion with himself, with his subconscious or subliminal self. He wanders along the well-worn pathway to the grave and, momentarily forgetful of his grief, feels the call of peace and

morning. But Psyche, his deeper soul-nature, sees an omen of ill. Hardly has he allayed the foreboding of Psyche when he comes abruptly upon the grave. Memory returns now with an added pang because of the interim of forgetfulness. A stanza from Alfred Noyes' *Iron Crown* touches upon the psychology of *Ulalume*:

> Not memory of vanished bliss,
> But suddenly to know
> I had forgotten! This, O this
> With iron crowned my woe.

Compare also Wordsworth's sonnet *Desideria,* and the tenth stanza of *The Portrait,* written by Rossetti in 1847.]

The skies they were ashen and sober;
The leaves they were crispéd and sere—
The leaves they were withering and sere;
It was night in the lonesome October
Of my most immemorial year;
It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,
In the misty mid region of Weir—
It was down by the dank tarn of Auber,
In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

Here once, through an alley Titanic,
Of cypress, I roamed with my Soul—
Of cypress, with Psyche, my Soul.
These were days when my heart was volcanic
As the scoriac rivers that roll—
As the lavas that restlessly roll
Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek
In the ultimate climes of the pole—
That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek
In the realms of the boreal pole.

Our talk had been serious and sober,
But our thoughts they were palsied and sere—
Our memories were treacherous and sere—
For we knew not the month was October,
And we marked not the night of the year—
(Ah, night of all nights in the year!)

We noted not the dim lake of Auber—
(Though once we had journeyed down here)—
Remembered not the dank tarn of Auber,
Nor the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

And now, as the night was senescent
And star-dials pointed to morn—
As the star-dials hinted of morn—
At the end of our path a liquescent
And nebulous lustre was born,
Out of which a miraculous crescent
Arose with a duplicate horn—
Astarté's bediamonded crescent
Distinct with its duplicate horn.

And I said—"She is warmer than Dian:
She rolls through an ether of sighs—
She revels in a region of sighs:
She has seen that the tears are not dry on
These cheeks, where the worm never dies,
And has come past the stars of the Lion
To point us the path to the skies—
To the Lethean peace of the skies—
Come up, in despite of the Lion,
To shine on us with her bright eyes—
Come up through the lair of the Lion,
With love in her luminous eyes."

But Psyche, uplifting her finger,
Said—"Sadly this star I mistrust—
Her pallor I strangely mistrust:—
Oh, hasten!—oh, let us not linger!
Oh, fly!—let us fly!—for we must."
In terror she spoke, letting sink her
Wings until they trailed in the dust—
In agony sobbed, letting sink her
Plumes till they trailed in the dust—
Till they sorrowfully trailed in the dust.

I replied—"This is nothing but dreaming:
Let us on by this tremulous light!
Let us bathe in this crystalline light!
Its Sibyllic splendour is beaming
With Hope and in Beauty to-night:—
See!—it flickers up the sky through the night!
Ah, we safely may trust to its gleaming,
And be sure it will lead us aright—
We safely may trust to a gleaming
That cannot but guide us aright,
Since it flickers up to Heaven through the night."

Thus I pacified Psyche and kissed her,
And tempted her out of her gloom—
And conquered her scruples and gloom;
And we passed to the end of the vista,
But were stopped by the door of a tomb—
By the door of a legended tomb;
And I said—"What is written, sweet sister,
On the door of this legended tomb?"
She replied—"Ulalume—Ulalume—
'Tis the vault of thy lost Ulalume!"

Then my heart it grew ashen and sober
As the leaves that were crispéd and sere—
As the leaves that were withering and sere,
And I cried—"It was surely October
On *this* very night of last year
That I journeyed—I journeyed down here—
That I brought a dread burden down here—
On this night of all nights in the year,
Ah, what demon has tempted me here?
Well I know, now, this dim lake of Auber—
This misty mid region of Weir—
Well I know, now, this dank tarn of Auber,
This ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir."

THE BELLS (1849)

[Echoic verse is not at best a high order of poetry but by common consent *The Bells* is, as Edwin Markham calls it, "the finest example in our language of the suggestive power of rhyme and of the echo of sound to sense." The poem grew by many revisions and augmentations from a slight thing of two unequal stanzas, celebrating, respectively, wedding bells and funeral bells.]

I

Hear the sledges with the bells—
Silver bells!
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,
In the icy air of night!
While the stars that oversprinkle
All the heavens, seem to twinkle
With a crystalline delight;

Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells—
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

II

Hear the mellow wedding bells,
Golden bells!
What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!
Through the balmy air of night
How they ring out their delight!—
From the molten-golden notes,
And all in tune,
What a liquid ditty floats
To the turtle-dove that listens, while she gloats
On the moon!
Oh, from out the sounding cells,
What a gush of euphony voluminously wells!
How it swells!
How it dwells
On the Future!—how it tells
Of the rapture that impels
To the swinging and the ringing
Of the bells, bells, bells—
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells—
To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells!

III

Hear the loud alarum bells—
Brazen bells!
What a tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells!
In the startled ear of night
How they scream out their affright!
Too much horrified to speak,
They can only shriek, shriek,
Out of tune,
In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire,
In a mad expostulation with the deaf and frantic fire,
Leaping higher, higher, higher,
With a desperate desire,
And a resolute endeavour
Now—now to sit, or never,

By the side of the pale-faced moon,
Oh, the bells, bells, bells!
What a tale their terror tells
Of Despair!
How they clang, and clash, and roar!
What a horror they outpour
On the bosom of the palpitating air!
Yet the ear, it fully knows,
By the twanging,
And the clanging,
How the danger ebbs and flows;
Yet the ear distinctly tells,
In the jangling,
And the wrangling,
How the danger sinks and swells,
By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the bells—
Of the bells—
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells—
In the clamour and the clangour of the bells!

IV

Hear the tolling of the bells—
Iron bells!
What a world of solemn thought their monody compels!
In the silence of the night,
How we shiver with affright
At the melancholy menace of their tone!
For every sound that floats
From the rust within their throats
Is a groan.
And the people—ah, the people—
They that dwell up in the steeple,
All alone,
And who, tolling, tolling, tolling,
In that muffled monotone,
Feel a glory in so rolling
On the human heart a stone—
They are neither man nor woman—
They are neither brute nor human—
They are Ghouls:—
And their king it is who tolls;—
And he rolls, rolls, rolls,
Rolls
A pæan from the bells!
And his merry bosom swells
With the pæan of the bells!
And he dances, and he yells;

Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the pæan of the bells:—
Of the bells:
Keeping time, time, time
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the throbbing of the bells—
Of the bells, bells, bells—
To the sobbing of the bells:—
Keeping time, time, time,
As he knells, knells, knells,
In a happy Runic rhyme,
To the rolling of the bells—
Of the bells, bells, bells:—
To the tolling of the bells—
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells—
To the moaning and the groaning of the bells.

FOR ANNIE (1849)

[The poem is named for Mrs. Annie Richmond, of Lowell, Massachusetts, who with her husband was a devoted and helpful friend of the Poe family. It is a tribute to love. That at least survives death. The dead lover speaks here from the grave as the surviving lover speaks in *The Raven, Ulalume,* and *Annabel Lee.* In *The Blessed Damosel* of Rossetti, which was suggested by *The Raven,* the condition is reversed: the loved one speaks from heaven to her lover on earth. Killis Campbell cites in explanation a passage from Poe's *Mesmeric Revelation*: "There are two bodies—the rudimental and the complete; corresponding with the two conditions of the worm and the butterfly. What we call 'death' is but the painful metamorphosis. Our present incarnation is progressive, preparatory, temporary. Our future is perfected, ultimate, immortal. The ultimate life is the full design." See also *The Colloquy of Monos and Una.*

The first part of the concluding speech of Monos (pages 327-332) is a sort of prose *For Annie.* Mallarmé considered this the best of Poe's poems, but he did not understand it: he thought the speaker was a convalescent.]

Thank Heaven! the crisis—
The danger is past,
And the lingering illness
Is over at last—
And the fever called "Living"
Is conquered at last.

Sadly, I know
I am shorn of my strength,
And no muscle I move
As I lie at full length—
But no matter!—I feel
I am better at length.

And I rest so composedly
Now, in my bed,
That any beholder
Might fancy me dead—
Might start at beholding me,
Thinking me dead.

The moaning and groaning,
The sighing and sobbing,
Are quieted now,
With that horrible throbbing
At heart:—ah that horrible,
Horrible throbbing!

The sickness—the nausea—
The pitiless pain—
Have ceased with the fever
That maddened my brain—
With the fever called "Living"
That burned in my brain.

And oh! of all tortures
That torture the worst
Has abated—the terrible
Torture of thirst
For the naphthaline river
Of Passion accurst:—
I have drank of a water
That quenches all thirst:—

Of a water that flows,
With a lullaby sound,
From a spring but a very few
Feet under ground—
From a cavern not very far
Down under ground.

And ah! let it never
Be foolishly said
That my room it is gloomy
And narrow my bed;
For man never slept
In a different bed—
And, to sleep, you must slumber
In just such a bed.

My tantalized spirit
Here blandly reposes,
Forgetting, or never
Regretting, its roses—
Its old agitations
Of myrtles and roses:

For now, while so quietly
Lying, it fancies
A holier odour
About it, of pansies—
A rosemary odour,
Commingled with pansies—
With rue and the beautiful
Puritan pansies.

And so it lies happily,
Bathing in many
A dream of the truth
And the beauty of Annie—
Drowned in a bath
Of the tresses of Annie.

She tenderly kissed me,
She fondly caressed,
And then I fell gently
To sleep on her breast—
Deeply to sleep
From the heaven of her breast.

When the light was extinguished
She covered me warm,
And she prayed to the angels
To keep me from harm—

To the queen of the angels
  To shield me from harm.

And I lie so composedly,
  Now, in my bed,
(Knowing her love)
  That you fancy me dead—
And I rest so contentedly,
  Now, in my bed,
(With her love at my breast)
  That you fancy me dead—
That you shudder to look at me,
  Thinking me dead:—

But my heart it is brighter
  Than all of the many
Stars of the sky,
  For it sparkles with Annie—
It glows with the light
  Of the love of my Annie—
With the thought of the light
  Of the eyes of my Annie.

ANNABEL LEE (1849)

[The reference is of course to Poe's wife and the poem ought to lay forever the absurd contention that Poe never really loved her, that his devotion was "rather of the nature of family affection than of wedded love." Love is here associated not with a rare flower, a strain of music, a familiar haunt, etc., but with the elemental, the universal, the rhythmically recurrent—with moon and stars. The Scotch critic, John Nichol, in his *American Literature* (1882), says of that part of Lowell's *Biglow Papers,* second series, beginning,

Under the yaller-pines I house,—

"This [to the close], not the *Commemoration Ode,* is the author's masterpiece. I set it beside *Annabel Lee,* and regard these two poems, totally different though

they are, as the two high-water marks of Transatlantic verse." Do not read "kinsman" instead of "kinsmen" in the line,

So that her high-born kinsmen came.

Poe meant the angels, not death.]

It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of ANNABEL LEE;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me.

I was a child and *she* was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea,
But we loved with a love that was more than love—
I and my ANNABEL LEE—
With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven
Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,
In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling
My beautiful ANNABEL LEE;
So that her highborn kinsmen came
And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulchre
In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in heaven,
Went envying her and me—
Yes!—that was the reason (as all men know,
In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud by night,
Chilling and killing my ANNABEL LEE.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
Of those who were older than we—
Of many far wiser than we—
And neither the angels in heaven above,
Nor the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE:

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams
Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE;
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE:

And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,
In the sepulchre there by the sea—
In her tomb by the sounding sea.

ELDORADO (1849)

["This poem," says Killis Campbell, "like the tale *Von Kempelen and his Discovery,* is a product of the 'gold-excitement' of '49 and one of many evidences of Poe's interest in contemporary matters." It is compact of high idealism and urgent resolve, and forms a fitting close to the life of one who, however the feet faltered, kept the vision always in front. Read it in the light of these words, written by Poe to F. W. Thomas on February 14, 1849: "Depend upon it after all, Thomas, literature is the most noble of professions. In fact, it is about the only one fit for a man. For my own part there is no seducing me from the path. I shall be a *littérateur* at least, all my life; nor would I abandon the hopes which still lead me on for all the gold in California. Talking of gold and of the temptation at present held out to 'poor-devil authors,' did it ever occur to you that all that is really valuable to a man of letters—to a poet in especial—is absolutely unpurchasable? Love, fame, the dominion of intellect, the consciousness of power, the thrilling sense of beauty, the free air of Heaven, exercise of body and mind, with the physical and moral health which result —these and such as these are really all that a poet cares for:—then answer me this—*why* should he go to California?"]

Gayly bedight,
A gallant knight,
In sunshine and in shadow,
Had journeyed long,
Singing a song,
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old—
This knight so bold—
And o'er his heart a shadow
Fell as he found
No spot of ground
That looked like Eldorado.

And, as his strength
Failed him at length,
He met a pilgrim shadow—
"Shadow," said he,
"Where can it be—
This land of Eldorado?"

"Over the Mountains
Of the Moon,
Down the Valley of the Shadow,
Ride, boldly ride,"
The shade replied.—
"If you seek for Eldorado!"

CHAPTER V

The Writer of Short Stories

I

The short story is recognized as the most distinctive contribution that Americans have made to national and international literature. Here if anywhere we have achieved a prestige that European critics neither deny nor begrudge. The type is the newest of all literary types and in its creation the masters are easily recognized. They are, in the order of their contributions, Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Bret Harte, Joel Chandler Harris, and O. Henry.

Irving legendized the new type, making it a means of storing legendary material in more permanent and attractive form. Hawthorne allegorized it, converting it into a sort of miniature *Pilgrim's Progress.* Harte localized it, and California became the first romantic region that was lifted into literature on the shoulders of the short story. Harris folklorized it, the Uncle Remus stories not only bringing the folktales of the negro into literature but making possible at the same time the scientific study of negro folklore. O. Henry socialized it, leaving it the most flexible and responsive *organon* of social reaction that American literature has to its credit. Poe's contribution was unlike any of these. He retold no legends, he looked askance at allegory, he brought no locality into literature, he saw no career for art in folklore, and he found

his creative inspiration not in the changing moods and whims of society about him but in the unchanging visions and questionings within. His central contribution to the new form was not content but structure. Poe standardized the short story.

This distinction, if just, invalidates to a degree the usual classification of Poe's stories according to topical content, or at least renders such classification less helpful than the classification based on structure. Irving, Hawthorne, Harte, Harris and O. Henry are rightly studied in their themes, for they not only identified themselves with these themes but illuminated each theme with a new popular interest and a steadily enlarging significance. Poe did not do this. It is well to know his themes but better still to know the principles of his architecture.

"Poe's tales," says Nettleton,[1] taking his cue from topic, "are usually divided into classes. Of the 'Tales of Death,' *The Fall of the House of Usher* and *Ligeia* are, in unity of tone and intensifying force toward the climax, almost flawless. Poe strove not so much to tell a story as to produce an effect—in one, of utter desolation, in the other, of despair. Of the 'Old World Romances,' the most noteworthy are *The Masque of the Red Death, The Cask of Amontillado,* and *The Assignation.* Terror is the note of the first, vengeance of the second, and of the third sensuousness. Of the 'Tales of Conscience,' Poe preferred *William Wilson* and *The Black Cat.* While Hawthorne turned to the spiritual allegory of the conscience, Poe turned rather to physical horrors. In the

[1] *Specimens of the Short Story,* by George Henry Nettleton (1901), p. 80.

'Tales of Pseudo-Science,' Poe sought the verisimilitude of Defoe and Swift. Perhaps his greatest successes are *The MS. Found in a Bottle* and *A Descent into the Maelström.* In these and many other similar tales Poe furnished the inspiration for Jules Verne's probable impossibilities. In the 'Tales of Ratiocination,' Poe laid the foundation for the modern school of 'detective stories.' In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue, The Mystery of Marie Rogêt, The Gold Bug,* and *The Purloined Letter,* Poe solved mysteries by the detective's process of analysis."

These divisions are also those made in the scholarly edition of Stedman and Woodberry, though Nettleton omits the "Tales of Illusion," such as *The Premature Burial,* and the "Tales of Extravaganza and Caprice," beginning with *The Duc de L' Omelette* and ending with *Mellonta Tauta.* He also omits, as not belonging to the short story, "Tales of Adventure and Exploration," which contain Poe's two longest narrative efforts, *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* and *The Journal of Julius Rodman.* But a simpler classification is that of Leon Kellner. "Three species of stories," he says,[2] "are to be distinguished: 'Psychological Problems for Their Own Sake,' (*Ligeia*), 'Pseudo-Scientific Phantasies' (*A Descent into the Maelström*), and 'Ingenious Disentanglements' (*The Purloined Letter*). An unparalleled boldness of invention, a masterly structure, and a compelling logic are common to all."

What, then, is the nature of the masterly structure, the compelling logic, common to the three spe-

[2] *Geschichte der nordamerikanischen Literatur,* II, II, 1913.

cies? Read again Poe's appraisal of Hawthorne, which we have entitled *The Technique of the Short Story* (pages 149-158). It was this review together with his consistent practice of its principles that gave Poe his priority and his primacy in the building of the new type. "Poe first laid down the principles," says Brander Matthews,[3] "which governed his own construction and which have been quoted very often, because they have been accepted by the masters of the short story in every modern language." Poe was the first to recognize in the sketchy tales of his day the possibilities of a type of literature as distinctive in its rôle and as exigent in its form as the novel or the drama or any other *genre,* however ancient and honorable its lineage. His influence on the new type was legislative, executive, and judicial: he framed the laws of its structure, he carried out these laws in his own stories, and he passed authoritative judgment on those who obeyed or disobeyed the code which he had himself enacted.

Making no attempt to circumscribe the topics amenable to short story treatment, Poe devoted his genius to the form of the new type. It must converge cumulatively and undeviatingly upon one and only one effect. This effect being the goal, the writer must see it and move straight toward it from the beginning. The old way was to begin with background or setting, with character or characters, with plot or plan. Poe saw at a glance that these three essentials of a short story might all be excellent in their separate kind and yet the story prove unappealing and ineffective. The

[3] *The Short-Story: Specimens Illustrating Its Development,* 1907, p. 25.

triumph of the story was to inhere not in the individual artistry of its three elements but in the higher artistry that, in blending the trinity, should make it illustrative of and convergent upon an irresistible unity. "In the presence of every question, considered independently and by itself," says General Foch,[4] "ask yourselves first, *What is the objective?*" It was precisely this question that Poe made central and controlling in the technique of the short story, and the history of the short story has ever since been divided into just two stages of development, before Poe and after.

To feel the full import of Poe's doctrine of convergence, think once more through the old traditional "laws" or "rules" of the drama, the epic, the novel, the essay, and especially the public address, anciently called the oration. Would not these forms be vitalized by the same fusing and re-creating process? Has there not grown up about each of them a *corpus* of rules that has become an end in itself? Confront them with the question, "What effect, what objective, what impassioned purpose, what vision and what visualized audience called you into being?" and the complacent answer would be, "None at all. We are conformists. We point backward to the canons of a long-perfected art, not forward to a merely projected effect." The time is coming when, even if the short story as a separate type of literature should perish, Poe's distinction will live in the energized life that it will have imparted to every form of human effort that seeks a definite and progressive goal. So far from making technique disproportionately controlling, Poe's

[4] *The Principles of War* (1918), p. 23.

special distinction is that he deprived it of all authority in itself and made it the humble servitor of previsioned effect.

It is interesting to observe that while Poe's stories fall into many topical divisions, he exemplified only two structural types. He began with the story in which the last paragraph is the key. The suspense is cumulative from the beginning and is relieved only at the end. This is the type of story that O. Henry has illustrated with a brilliancy and resourcefulness that have led not a few critics to see in his work the discovery of a new territory rather than the happy colonization of an old. This kind of story is necessarily short because suspense, especially the tragic kind that Poe frequently imposes, becomes burdensome if the *finale* is needlessly or heedlessly delayed. Masterpieces of this type are *The MS. Found in a Bottle, Berenice, Morella, The Assignation, A Descent into the Maelström, Ligeia, The Fall of the House of Usher, William Wilson, The Masque of the Red Death, The Pit and the Pendulum, The Tell-Tale Heart, The Black Cat,* and *The Cask of Amontillado.* The first was written in 1833, the last in 1846. We may call this the cuneiform type because it is wedge-shaped, coming to a point or edge at the end. Perhaps, if we think of background, plot, and character as narrowing upward to the apex or point of culminating effect, a better name would be the A type.

The second type preserves suspense and illustrates totality of effect as successfully as the A type; but there is a pause in the middle of the story: a part of the *dénouement* has been glimpsed but not the whole. Curiosity is not relaxed but released for a more in-

tense effort. If a murder has been committed, part one of the story ends with the mystery apparently insoluble but with curiosity projected over to part two in which there is a progressive and satisfying solution. If a buried treasure or a stolen letter is sought, part one ends with its finding; part two tells how it was found. You may bend back the second part over the first part and the two will be found to correspond in structure about as an itemized letter of inquiry corresponds to the similarly itemized reply. Stories of this kind are longer than those of the A type because there are two processes, tying and untying, complication and explication, enciphering and deciphering. If the A type is more artistic in the accepted sense, the second type is more ingenious, more intellectual, appealing as it does to the puzzle-solving instinct that every reader has to a degree. Poe called the second type "Tales of Ratiocination" (see page 240) and from them sprang the modern detective story. The first masterpiece of this type, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue,* was written in 1841; the last *The Purloined Letter,* in 1845. If we call the first type cuneiform, we may call this type insectiform, because, as in insects, there is an apparent cut or dip inward near the middle of the body. But if A represent the structure of the first type, B may well represent the structure of the second type, the two semicircles of the letter picturing the two movements of the story toward its preordained conclusion. The meeting of the two semicircles is where complication ends and explication begins. The poems, by the way, belong prevailingly to the A type, *The Haunted Palace* alone suggesting the B type.

II

The two stories that follow represent respectively the A type and the B type. To the prospective writer of short stories as well as to the general reader, a study of Poe's two structural routes climbing to a common peak of effect will prove a constant quickening and enlargement of narrative power.

LIGEIA (1838)

And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.—JOSEPH GLANVILL.

[The text is found in the introductory quotation from Joseph Glanvill. Charles F. Richardson, in the Arnheim Edition of Poe, says: "The limner of death [Poe] was what he was because he insisted that death must yield to the forceful self-assertion of a quenchless soul . . . In one thing his name must rank high in the spiritual movements of his time and of all time: his insistence upon the earned perpetuity of personal assertion. The individual will live because it wills to live; that is his gospel from first to last." It is certainly his gospel in *Ligeia* and its prototype, *Morella* (1835). These two stories make an interesting comparative study, both developing the same theme of will victorious over death and both being perfect examples of the A type of structure. Philip Pendleton Cooke wrote Poe that *Ligeia* would have been a better story if the reader had been made more gradually aware of the change from Rowena to Ligeia and "if Rowena's bodily form had been retained as a shell or case for

the disembodied Lady Ligeia." Poe replied: "You are right— and this idea was mine—had I never written before I should have adopted it—but then there is *Morella*... Since *Morella* is upon record I will suffer *Ligeia* to remain as it is." Seven years later he writes to Cooke: "The loftiest kind [of tale] is that of the highest imagination—and, for this reason only, *Ligeia* may be called my *best* tale. I have much improved this last since you saw it and I mail you a copy, as well as a copy of my best specimen of analysis—*The Philosophy of Composition*." The edition of *Ligeia* that Poe sent to Cooke is the one here reproduced. See also the note introducing *The Conqueror Worm*, pages 217-219.]

I cannot, for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with the Lady Ligeia. Long years have since elapsed, and my memory is feeble through much suffering. Or, perhaps, I cannot *now* bring these points to mind, because in truth the character of my beloved, her rare learning, her singular yet placid cast of beauty, and the thrilling and enthralling eloquence of her low musical language, made their way into my heart by paces so steadily and stealthily progressive that they have been unnoticed and unknown. Yet I believe that I met her first and most frequently in some large, old, decaying city near the Rhine. Of her family I have surely heard her speak. That it is of a remotely ancient date cannot be doubted. Ligeia! Ligeia! Buried in studies of a nature more than all else adapted to deaden impressions of the outward world, it is by that sweet word alone—by Ligeia—that I bring before

mine eyes in fancy the image of her who is no more. And now, while I write, a recollection flashes upon me that I have *never known* the paternal name of her who was my friend and my betrothed, and who became the partner of my studies, and finally the wife of my bosom. Was it a playful charge on the part of my Ligeia? or was it a test of my strength of affection, that I should institute no inquiries upon this point? or was it rather a caprice of my own—a wildly romantic offering on the shrine of the most passionate devotion? I but indistinctly recall the fact itself—what wonder that I have utterly forgotten the circumstances which originated or attended it? And, indeed, if ever that spirit which is entitled *Romance*—if ever she, the wan and the misty-winged Ashtophet of idolatrous Egypt, presided, as they tell, over marriage ill-omened, then most surely she presided over mine.

There is one dear topic, however, on which my memory fails me not. It is the *person* of Ligeia. In stature she was tall, somewhat slender, and, in her latter days, even emaciated. I would in vain attempt to portray the majesty, the quiet ease, of her demeanor, or the incomprehensible lightness and elasticity of her footfall. She came and departed as a shadow. I was never made aware of her entrance into my closed study, save by the dear music of her low sweet voice, as she placed her marble hand upon my shoulder. In beauty of face no maiden ever equalled her. It was the radiance of an opium-dream—an airy and spirit-lifting vision more wildly divine than the fantasies which hovered about the slumbering souls of the daughters of Delos. Yet her features were not of that regular mould which we have been falsely taught

to worship in the classical labors of the heathen. "There is no exquisite beauty," says Bacon, Lord Verulam, speaking truly of all the forms and genera of beauty, "without some *strangeness* in the proportion." Yet, although I saw that the features of Ligeia were not of a classic regularity—although I perceived that her loveliness was indeed "exquisite," and felt that there was much of "strangeness" pervading it, yet I have tried in vain to detect the irregularity and to trace home my own perception of "the strange." I examined the contour of the lofty and pale forehead: it was faultless—how cold indeed that word when applied to a majesty so divine!—the skin rivalling the purest ivory, the commanding extent and repose, the gentle prominence of the regions above the temples; and then the raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant and naturally curling tresses, setting forth the full force of the Homeric epithet, "hyacinthine!" I looked at the delicate outline of the nose—and nowhere but in the graceful medallions of the Hebrews had I beheld a similar perfection. There were the same luxurious smoothness of surface, the same scarcely perceptible tendency to the aquiline, the same harmoniously curved nostrils speaking the free spirit. I regarded the sweet mouth. Here was indeed the triumph of all things heavenly—the magnificent turn of the short upper lip—the soft, voluptuous slumber of the under—the dimples which sported, and the color which spoke—the teeth glancing back, with a brilliancy almost startling, every ray of the holy light which fell upon them in her serene and placid, yet most exultingly radiant of all smiles. I scrutinized the formation of the chin: and here, too, I found the gentleness of breadth,

the softness and the majesty, the fulness and the spirituality, of the Greek—the contour which the god Apollo revealed but in a dream to Cleomenes, the son of the Athenian. And then I peered into the large eyes of Ligeia.

For eyes we have no models in the remotely antique. It might have been, too, that in these eyes of my beloved lay the secret to which Lord Verulam alludes. They were, I must believe, far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race. They were even fuller than the fullest of the gazelle eyes of the tribe of the valley of Nourjahad. Yet it was only at intervals—in moments of intense excitement—that this peculiarity became more than slightly noticeable in Ligeia. And at such moments was her beauty—in my heated fancy thus it appeared perhaps—the beauty of beings either above or apart from the earth, the beauty of the fabulous Houri of the Turk. The hue of the orbs was the most brilliant of black, and, far over them, hung jetty lashes of great length. The brows, slightly irregular in outline, had the same tint. The "strangeness," however, which I found in the eyes, was of a nature distinct from the formation, or the color, or the brilliancy of the features, and must, after all, be referred to the *expression*. Ah, word of no meaning! behind whose vast latitude of mere sound we intrench our ignorance of so much of the spiritual. The expression of the eyes of Ligeia! How for long hours have I pondered upon it! How have I, through the whole of a midsummer night, struggled to fathom it! What was it—that something more profound than the well of Democritus—which lay far within the pupils of my beloved? What *was* it? I was possessed with a pas-

sion to discover. Those eyes! those large, those shining, those divine orbs! they became to me twin stars of Leda, and I to them devoutest of astrologers.

There is no point, among the many incomprehensible anomalies of the science of mind, more thrillingly exciting than the fact—never, I believe, noticed in the schools—that in our endeavors to recall to memory something long forgotten, we often find ourselves *upon the very verge* of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember. And thus how frequently, in my intense scrutiny of Ligeia's eyes, have I felt approaching the full knowledge of their expression—felt it approaching, yet not quite be mine, and so at length entirely depart! And (strange, oh strangest mystery of all!) I found, in the commonest objects of the universe, a circle of analogies to that expression. I mean to say that, subsequently to the period when Ligeia's beauty passed into my spirit, there dwelling as in a shrine, I derived, from many existences in the material world, a sentiment such as I felt always around, within me, by her large and luminous orbs. Yet not the more could I define that sentiment, or analyze, or even steadily view it. I recognized it, let me repeat, sometimes in the survey of a rapidly growing vine—in the contemplation of a moth, a butterfly, a chrysalis, a stream of running water. I have felt it in the ocean; in the falling of a meteor. I have felt it in the glances of unusually aged people. And there are one or two stars in heaven, (one especially, a star of the sixth magnitude, double and changeable, to be found near the large star in Lyra,) in a telescopic scrutiny of which I have been made aware of the feeling. I have been filled with it by certain sounds from

stringed instruments, and not unfrequently by passages from books. Among innumerable other instances, I well remember something in a volume of Joseph Glanvill's, which (perhaps merely from its quaintness—who shall say?) never failed to inspire me with the sentiment: "And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will."

Length of years and subsequent reflection have enabled me to trace, indeed, some remote connection between this passage in the English moralist and a portion of the character of Ligeia. An *intensity* in thought, action, or speech, was possibly, in her, a result, or at least an index, of that gigantic volition which, during our long intercourse, failed to give other and more immediate evidence of its existence. Of all the women whom I have ever known, she, the outwardly calm, the ever-placid Ligeia, was the most violently a prey to the tumultuous vultures of stern passion. And of such passion I could form no estimate, save by the miraculous expansion of those eyes which at once so delighted and appalled me—by the almost magical melody, modulation, distinctness, and placidity of her very low voice—and by the fierce energy (rendered doubly effective by contrast with her manner of utterance) of the wild words which she habitually uttered.

I have spoken of the learning of Ligeia: it was immense—such as I have never known in woman. In

the classical tongues was she deeply proficient, and as far as my own acquaintance extended in regard to the modern dialects of Europe, I have never known her at fault. Indeed upon any theme of the most admired, because simply the most abstruse of the boasted erudition of the academy, have I *ever* found Ligeia at fault? How singularly, how thrillingly, this one point in the nature of my wife has forced itself, at this late period only, upon my attention! I said her knowledge was such as I have never known in woman—but where breathes the man who has traversed, and successfully, *all* the wide areas of moral, physical, and mathematical science? I saw not then what I now clearly perceive, that the acquisitions of Ligeia were gigantic, were astounding; yet I was sufficiently aware of her infinite supremacy to resign myself, with a child-like confidence, to her guidance through the chaotic world of metaphysical investigation at which I was most busily occupied during the earlier years of our marriage. With how vast a triumph, with how vivid a delight, with how much of all that is ethereal in hope, did I *feel*, as she bent over me in studies but little sought—but less known—that delicious vista by slow degrees expanding before me, down whose long, gorgeous, and all untrodden path, I might at length pass onward to the goal of a wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden!

How poignant, then, must have been the grief with which, after some years, I beheld my well-grounded expectations take wings to themselves and fly away! Without Ligeia I was but as a child groping benighted. Her presence, her readings alone, rendered vividly luminous the many mysteries of the transcendentalism

in which we were immersed. Wanting the radiant lustre of her eyes, letters, lambent and golden, grew duller than Saturnian lead. And now those eyes shone less and less frequently upon the pages over which I pored. Ligeia grew ill. The wild eyes blazed with a too—too glorious effulgence; the pale fingers became of the transparent waxen hue of the grave; and the blue veins upon the lofty forehead swelled and sank impetuously with the tides of the most gentle emotion. I saw that she must die—and I struggled desperately in spirit with the grim Azrael. And the struggles of the passionate wife were, to my astonishment, even more energetic than my own. There had been much in her stern nature to impress me with the belief that to her, death would have come without its terrors; but not so. Words are impotent to convey any just idea of the fierceness of resistance with which she wrestled with the Shadow. I groaned in anguish at the pitiable spectacle. I would have soothed—I would have reasoned; but, in the intensity of her wild desire for life—for life—*but* for life—solace and reason were alike the uttermost of folly. Yet not until the last instance, amid the most convulsive writhings of her fierce spirit, was shaken the external placidity of her demeanor. Her voice grew more gentle—grew more low—yet I would not wish to dwell upon the wild meaning of the quietly uttered words. My brain reeled as I hearkened, entranced, to a melody more than mortal—to assumptions and aspirations which mortality had never before known.

That she loved me I should not have doubted; and I might have been easily aware that, in a bosom such as hers, love would have reigned no ordinary passion.

But in death only was I fully impressed with the strength of her affection. For long hours, detaining my hand, would she pour out before me the overflowing of a heart whose more than passionate devotion amounted to idolatry. How had I deserved to be so blessed by such confessions? how had I deserved to be so cursed with the removal of my beloved in the hour of her making them? But upon this subject I cannot bear to dilate. Let me say only, that in Ligeia's more than womanly abandonment to a love, alas! all unmerited, all unworthily bestowed, I at length recognized the principle of her longing with so wildly earnest a desire for the life which was now fleeing so rapidly away. It is this wild longing, it is this eager vehemence of desire for life—*but* for life, that I have no power to portray, no utterance capable of expressing.

At high noon of the night in which she departed, beckoning me peremptorily to her side, she bade me repeat certain verses composed by herself not many days before. I obeyed her. They were these: [See *The Conqueror Worm*, pages 219-220.]

"O God!" half shrieked Ligeia, leaping to her feet and extending her arms aloft with a spasmodic movement, as I made an end of these lines—"O God! O Divine Father! shall these things be undeviatingly so? shall this conqueror be not once conquered? Are we not part and parcel in Thee? Who—who knoweth the mysteries of the will with its vigor? 'Man doth not yield him to the angels, *nor unto death utterly*, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.'"

And now, as if exhausted with emotion, she suf-

fered her white arms to fall, and returned solemnly to her bed of death. And as she breathed her last sighs, there came mingled with them a low murmur from her lips. I bent to them my ear, and distinguished, again, the concluding words of the passage in Glanvill: *"Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will."*

She died: and I, crushed into the very dust with sorrow, could no longer endure the lonely desolation of my dwelling in the dim and decaying city by the Rhine. I had no lack of what the world calls wealth. Ligeia had brought me far more, very far more, than ordinarily falls to the lot of mortals. After a few months, therefore, of weary and aimless wandering, I purchased, and put in some repair, an abbey, which I shall not name, in one of the wildest and least frequented portions of fair England. The gloomy and dreary grandeur of the building, the almost savage aspect of the domain, the many melancholy and time-honored memories connected with both, had much in unison with the feelings of utter abandonment which had driven me into that remote and unsocial region of the country. Yet although the external abbey, with its verdant decay hanging about it, suffered but little alteration, I gave way with a child-like perversity, and perchance with a faint hope of alleviating my sorrows, to a display of more than regal magnificence within. For such follies, even in childhood, I had imbibed a taste, and now they came back to me as if in the dotage of grief. Alas, I feel how much even of incipient madness might have been discovered in the gorgeous and fantastic draperies, in the solemn carvings

of Egypt, in the wild cornices and furniture, in the Bedlam patterns of the carpets of tufted gold! I had become a bounden slave in the trammels of opium, and my labors and my orders had taken a coloring from my dreams. But these absurdities I must not pause to detail. Let me speak only of that one chamber ever accursed, whither, in a moment of mental alienation, I led from the altar as my bride—as the successor of the unforgotten Ligeia—the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine.

There is no individual portion of the architecture and decoration of that bridal chamber which is not now visibly before me. Where were the souls of the haughty family of the bride, when, through thirst of gold, they permitted to pass the threshold of an apartment *so* bedecked, a maiden and a daughter so beloved? I have said that I minutely remember the details of the chamber—yet I am sadly forgetful on topics of deep moment; and here there was no system, no keeping, in the fantastic display, to take hold upon the memory. The room lay in a high turret of the castellated abbey, was pentagonal in shape, and of capacious size. Occupying the whole southern face of the pentagon was the sole window—an immense sheet of unbroken glass from Venice—a single pane, and tinted of a leaden hue, so that the rays of either the sun or moon, passing through it, fell with a ghastly lustre on the objects within. Over the upper portion of this huge window extended the trellis-work of an aged vine, which clambered up the massy walls of the turret. The ceiling, of gloomy-looking oak, was excessively lofty, vaulted, and elaborately fretted with the wildest and most grotesque specimens of a semi-

Gothic, semi-Druidical device. From out the most central recess of this melancholy vaulting depended, by a single chain of gold with long links, a huge censer of the same metal, Saracenic in pattern, and with many perforations so contrived that there writhed in and out of them, as if endued with a serpent vitality, a continual succession of parti-colored fires.

Some few ottomans and golden candelabra, of Eastern figure, were in various stations about; and there was the couch, too—the bridal couch—of an Indian model, and low, and sculptured of solid ebony, with a pall-like canopy above. In each of the angles of the chamber stood on end a gigantic sarcophagus of black granite, from the tombs of the kings over against Luxor, with their aged lids full of immemorial sculpture. But in the draping of the apartment lay, alas! the chief fantasy of all. The lofty walls, gigantic in height, even unproportionably so, were hung from summit to foot, in vast folds, with a heavy and massive-looking tapestry—tapestry of a material which was found alike as a carpet on the floor, as a covering for the ottomans and the ebony bed, as a canopy for the bed, and as the gorgeous volutes of the curtains which partially shaded the window. The material was the richest cloth of gold. It was spotted all over, at irregular intervals, with arabesque figures, about a foot in diameter, and wrought upon the cloth in patterns of the most jetty black. But these figures partook of the true character of the arabesque only when regarded from a single point of view. By a contrivance now common, and indeed traceable to a very remote period of antiquity, they were made changeable in aspect. To one entering the

room, they bore the appearance of simple monstrosities; but upon a farther advance, this appearance gradually departed; and, step by step, as the visitor moved his station in the chamber, he saw himself surrounded by an endless succession of the ghastly forms which belong to the superstition of the Norman, or arise in the guilty slumbers of the monk. The phantasmagoric effect was vastly heightened by the artificial introduction of a strong continual current of wind behind the draperies, giving a hideous and uneasy animation to the whole.

In halls such as these, in a bridal chamber such as this, I passed, with the Lady of Tremaine, the unhallowed hours of the first month of our marriage—passed them with but little disquietude. That my wife dreaded the fierce moodiness of my temper—that she shunned me, and loved me but little—I could not help perceiving; but it gave me rather pleasure than otherwise. I loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man. My memory flew back (oh, with what intensity of regret!) to Ligeia, the beloved, the august, the beautiful, the entombed. I revelled in recollections of her purity, of her wisdom, of her lofty, her ethereal nature, of her passionate, her idolatrous love. Now, then, did my spirit fully and freely burn with more than all the fires of her own. In the excitement of my opium dreams, (for I was habitually fettered in the shackles of the drug) I would call aloud upon her name, during the silence of the night, or among the sheltered recesses of the glens by day, as if, through the wild eagerness, the solemn passion, the consuming ardor of my longing for the departed, I could restore her to

the pathway she had abandoned—ah, *could* it be forever?—upon the earth.

About the commencement of the second month of the marriage, the Lady Rowena was attacked with sudden illness, from which her recovery was slow. The fever which consumed her rendered her nights uneasy; and in her perturbed state of half-slumber, she spoke of sounds, and of motions, in and about the chamber of the turret, which I concluded had no origin save in the distemper of her fancy, or perhaps in the phantasmagoric influences of the chamber itself. She became at length convalescent—finally, well. Yet but a brief period elapsed, ere a second more violent disorder again threw her upon a bed of suffering; and from this attack her frame, at all times feeble, never altogether recovered. Her illnesses were, after this epoch, of alarming character, and of more alarming recurrence, defying alike the knowledge and the great exertions of her physicians. With the increase of the chronic disease, which had thus apparently taken too sure hold upon her constitution to be eradicated by human means, I could not fail to observe a similar increase in the nervous irritation of her temperament, and in her excitability by trivial causes of fear. She spoke again, and now more frequently and pertinaciously, of the sounds—of the slight sounds—and of the unusual motions among the tapestries, to which she had formerly alluded.

One night, near the closing in of September, she pressed this distressing subject with more than usual emphasis upon my attention. She had just awakened from an unquiet slumber, and I had been watching, with feelings half of anxiety, half of vague terror,

the workings of her emaciated countenance. I sat by the side of her ebony bed, upon one of the ottomans of India. She partly arose, and spoke, in an earnest low whisper, of sounds which she *then* heard, but which I could not hear—of motions which she *then* saw, but which I could not perceive. The wind was rushing hurriedly behind the tapestries, and I wished to show her (what, let me confess it, I could not *all* believe) that those almost inarticulate breathings, and those very gentle variations of the figures upon the wall, were but the natural effects of that customary rushing of the wind. But a deadly pallor, overspreading her face, had proved to me that my exertions to reassure her would be fruitless. She appeared to be fainting, and no attendants were within call. I remembered where was deposited a decanter of light wine which had been ordered by her physicians, and hastened across the chamber to procure it. But, as I stepped beneath the light of the censer, two circumstances of a startling nature attracted my attention. I had felt that some palpable although invisible object had passed lightly by my person; and I saw that there lay upon the golden carpet, in the very middle of the rich lustre thrown from the censer, a shadow—a faint, indefinite shadow of angelic aspect—such as might be fancied for the shadow of a shade. But I was wild with the excitement of an immoderate dose of opium, and heeded these things but little, nor spoke of them to Rowena. Having found the wine, I recrossed the chamber, and poured out a gobletful, which I held to the lips of the fainting lady. She had now partially recovered, however, and took the vessel herself, while I sank upon an ottoman near me, with my eyes fas-

tened upon her person. It was then that I became distinctly aware of a gentle footfall upon the carpet, and near the couch; and in a second thereafter, as Rowena was in the act of raising the wine to her lips, I saw, or may have dreamed that I saw, fall within the goblet, as if from some invisible spring in the atmosphere of the room, three or four large drops of a brilliant and ruby-colored fluid. If this I saw—not so Rowena. She swallowed the wine unhesitatingly, and I forbore to speak to her of a circumstance which must after all, I considered, have been but the suggestion of a vivid imagination, rendered morbidly active by the terror of the lady, by the opium, and by the hour.

Yet I cannot conceal it from my own perception that, immediately subsequent to the fall of the ruby-drops, a rapid change for the worse took place in the disorder of my wife; so that, on the third subsequent night, the hands of her menials prepared her for the tomb, and on the fourth, I sat alone, with her shrouded body, in that fantastic chamber which had received her as my bride. Wild visions, opium-engendered, flitted shadow-like before me. I gazed with unquiet eye upon the sarcophagi in the angles of the room, upon the varying figures of the drapery, and upon the writhing of the parti-colored fires in the censer overhead. My eyes then fell, as I called to mind the circumstances of a former night, to the spot beneath the glare of the censer where I had seen the faint traces of the shadow. It was there, however, no longer; and breathing with greater freedom, I turned my glances to the pallid and rigid figure upon the bed. Then rushed upon me a thousand memories of Ligeia—and then came back upon my heart, with the turbulent violence of a flood,

the whole of that unutterable woe with which I had regarded *her* thus enshrouded. The night waned; and still, with a bosom full of bitter thoughts of the one only and supremely beloved, I remained gazing upon the body of Rowena.

It might have been midnight, or perhaps earlier, or later, for I had taken no note of time, when a sob, low, gentle, but very distinct, startled me from my revery. I *felt* that it came from the bed of ebony—the bed of death. I listened in an agony of superstitious terror —but there was no repetition of the sound. I strained my vision to detect any motion in the corpse—but there was not the slightest perceptible. Yet I could not have been deceived. I *had* heard the noise, however faint, and my soul was awakened within me. I resolutely and perseveringly kept my attention riveted upon the body. Many minutes elapsed before any circumstance occurred tending to throw light upon the mystery. At length it became evident that a slight, a very feeble, and barely noticeable tinge of color had flushed up within the cheeks, and along the sunken small veins of the eyelids. Through a species of unutterable horror and awe, for which the language of mortality has no sufficiently energetic expression, I felt my heart cease to beat, my limbs grow rigid where I sat. Yet a sense of duty finally operated to restore my self-possession. I could no longer doubt that we had been precipitate in our preparations—that Rowena still lived. It was necessary that some immediate exertion be made; yet the turret was altogether apart from the portion of the abbey tenanted by the servants—there were none within call—I had no means of summoning them to my aid without leav-

ing the room for many minutes—and this I could not venture to do. I therefore struggled alone in my endeavors to call back the spirit still hovering. In a short period it was certain, however, that a relapse had taken place; the color disappeared from both eyelid and cheek, leaving a wanness even more than that of marble; the lips became doubly shrivelled and pinched up in the ghastly expression of death; a repulsive clamminess and coldness overspread rapidly the surface of the body; and all the usual rigorous stiffness immediately supervened. I fell back with a shudder upon the couch from which I had been so startlingly aroused, and again gave myself up to passionate waking visions of Ligeia.

An hour thus elapsed, when (could it be possible?) I was a second time aware of some vague sound issuing from the region of the bed. I listened—in extremity of horror. The sound came again—it was a sigh. Rushing to the corpse, I saw—distinctly saw—a tremor upon the lips. In a minute afterwards they relaxed, disclosing a bright line of the pearly teeth. Amazement now struggled in my bosom with the profound awe which had hitherto reigned there alone. I felt that my vision grew dim, that my reason wandered; and it was only by a violent effort that I at length succeeded in nerving myself to the task which duty thus once more had pointed out. There was now a partial glow upon the forehead and upon the cheek and throat; a perceptible warmth pervaded the whole frame; there was even a slight pulsation at the heart. The lady *lived*; and with redoubled ardor I betook myself to the task of restoration. I chafed and bathed the temples and the hands, and used every exertion

which experience, and no little medical reading, could suggest. But in vain. Suddenly, the color fled, the pulsation ceased, the lips resumed the expression of the dead, and, in an instant afterward, the whole body took upon itself the icy chilliness, the livid hue, the intense rigidity, the sunken outline, and all the loathsome peculiarities of that which has been, for many days, a tenant of the tomb.

And again I sunk into visions of Ligeia—and again, (what marvel that I shudder while I write?) *again* there reached my ears a low sob from the region of the ebony bed. But why shall I minutely detail the unspeakable horrors of that night? Why shall I pause to relate how, time after time, until near the period of the gray dawn, this hideous drama of revivification was repeated; how each terrific relapse was only into a sterner and apparently more irredeemable death; how each agony wore the aspect of a struggle with some invisible foe; and how each struggle was succeeded by I know not what of wild change in the personal appearance of the corpse? Let me hurry to a conclusion.

The greater part of the fearful night had worn away, and she who had been dead, once again stirred—and now more vigorously than hitherto, although arousing from a dissolution more appalling in its utter helplessness than any. I had long ceased to struggle or to move, and remained sitting rigidly upon the ottoman, a helpless prey to a whirl of violent emotions, of which extreme awe was perhaps the least terrible, the least consuming. The corpse, I repeat, stirred, and now more vigorously than before. The hues of life flushed up with unwonted energy into the counte-

nance—the limbs relaxed—and, save that the eyelids were yet pressed heavily together, and that the bandages and draperies of the grave still imparted their charnel character to the figure, I might have dreamed that Rowena had indeed shaken off, utterly, the fetters of Death. But if this idea was not, even then, altogether adopted, I could at least doubt no longer, when, arising from the bed, tottering, with feeble steps, with closed eyes, and with the manner of one bewildered in a dream, the thing that was enshrouded advanced bodily and palpably into the middle of the apartment.

I trembled not—I stirred not—for a crowd of unutterable fancies connected with the air, the stature, the demeanor of the figure, rushing hurriedly through my brain, had paralyzed—had chilled me into stone. I stirred not—but gazed upon the apparition. There was a mad disorder in my thoughts—a tumult unappeasable. Could it, indeed, be the *living* Rowena who confronted me? Could it indeed be Rowena *at all*—the fair-haired, the blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion of Tremaine? Why, *why* should I doubt it? The bandage lay heavily about the mouth—but then might it not be the mouth of the breathing Lady of Tremaine? And the cheeks—there were the roses as in her noon of life—yes, these might indeed be the fair cheeks of the living Lady of Tremaine. And the chin, with its dimples, as in health, might it not be hers? but *had she then grown taller since her malady?* What inexpressible madness seized me with that thought? One bound, and I had reached her feet! Shrinking from my touch, she let fall from her head the ghastly cerements which had confined it, and there streamed forth, into the rushing atmosphere of

the chamber, huge masses of long and dishevelled hair; *it was blacker than the wings of midnight!* And now slowly opened *the eyes* of the figure which stood before me. "Here then, at least," I shrieked aloud, "can I never—can I never be mistaken—these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes—of my lost love —of the Lady—of the LADY LIGEIA."

THE PURLOINED LETTER (1845)

Nil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio.—SENECA.

[The sub-title or enveloping theme might well be called "The Elusiveness of the Obvious." The story is the last of the tales of ratiocination and, like all of Poe's stories of this type, is poured from the B mould. There is an unmistakable note of autobiography in Poe's masterly defense of the poetical and mathematical faculties conjoined. "As poet *and* mathematician," says Dupin, "he [the Minister] would reason well; as mere mathematician, he could not have reasoned at all." Dupin, more fully portrayed in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue,* is Poe's best known character. He is the original of Doctor Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and of all the other notable detectives in recent literature, though it is hardly true, as Leon Kellner puts it, that "Conan Doyle's copy of Poe's Dupin, the now ubiquitous detective genius, Sherlock Holmes, has crowded his prototype out of the memory of the world." It is one of the curiosities of literature that this story is partly responsible for the phrase, "a scrap of paper," which assumed so sinister a significance at the beginning of the World War. The phrase emerged as the name of a play put

together by Sardou in 1861 and produced in New York by Lester Wallack. Sardou called his play *Les pattes de mouche* but it was a blend of *The Gold-Bug* and *The Purloined Letter.* As "a scrap of paper" figures prominently in the former story, the phrase became the title of Sardou's play when translated into English.]

At Paris, just after dark one gusty evening in the autumn of 18—, I was enjoying the twofold luxury of meditation and a meerschaum, in company with my friend C. Auguste Dupin, in his little back library, or book closet, *au troisième,* No. 33, Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain. For one hour at least we had maintained a profound silence; while each, to any casual observer, might have seemed intently and exclusively occupied with the curling eddies of smoke that oppressed the atmosphere of the chamber. For myself, however, I was mentally discussing certain topics which had formed matter for conversation between us at an earlier period of the evening; I mean the affair of the Rue Morgue, and the mystery attending the murder of Marie Rogêt. I looked upon it, therefore, as something of a coincidence, when the door of our apartment was thrown open and admitted our old acquaintance, Monsieur G——, the Prefect of the Parisian police.

We gave him a hearty welcome; for there was nearly half as much of the entertaining as of the contemptible about the man, and we had not seen him for several years. We had been sitting in the dark, and Dupin now arose for the purpose of lighting a lamp, but sat down again, without doing so, upon

G——'s saying that he had called to consult us, or rather to ask the opinion of my friend, about some official business which had occasioned a great deal of trouble.

"If it is any point requiring reflection," observed Dupin, as he forebore to enkindle the wick, "we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark."

"That is another of your odd notions," said the Prefect, who had a fashion of calling everything "odd" that was beyond his comprehension, and thus lived amid an absolute legion of "oddities."

"Very true," said Dupin, as he supplied his visitor with a pipe, and rolled towards him a comfortable chair.

"And what is the difficulty now?" I asked. "Nothing more in the assassination way, I hope?"

"Oh, no; nothing of that nature. The fact is, the business is *very* simple indeed, and I make no doubt that we can manage it sufficiently well ourselves; but then I thought Dupin would like to hear the details of it, because it is so excessively *odd*."

"Simple and odd," said Dupin.

"Why, yes; and not exactly that, either. The fact is, we have all been a good deal puzzled because the affair *is* so simple, and yet baffles us altogether."

"Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault," said my friend.

"What nonsense you *do* talk!" replied the Prefect, laughing heartily.

"Perhaps the mystery is a little *too* plain," said Dupin.

"Oh, good Heavens! who ever heard of such an idea?"

"A little *too* self-evident."

"Ha! ha! ha!—ha! ha! ha!—ho! ho! ho!" roared our visitor, profoundly amused. "O Dupin, you will be the death of me yet!"

"And what, after all, *is* the matter on hand?" I asked.

"Why, I will tell you," replied the Prefect, as he gave a long, steady, and contemplative puff, and settled himself in his chair. "I will tell you in a few words; but, before I begin, let me caution you that this is an affair demanding the greatest secrecy, and that I should most probably lose the position I now hold were it known that I confided it to any one."

"Proceed," said I.

"Or not," said Dupin.

"Well, then; I have received personal information, from a very high quarter, that a certain document of the last importance has been purloined from the royal apartments. The individual who purloined it is known; this beyond a doubt; he was seen to take it. It is known, also, that it still remains in his possession."

"How is this known?" asked Dupin.

"It is clearly inferred," replied the Prefect, "from the nature of the document, and from the non-appearance of certain results which would at once arise from its passing *out* of the robber's possession; that is to say, from his employing it as he must design in the end to employ it."

"Be a little more explicit," I said.

"Well, I may venture so far as to say that the paper gives its holder a certain power in a certain quarter where such power is immensely valuable." The Prefect was fond of the cant of diplomacy.

"Still I do not quite understand," said Dupin.

"No? well; the disclosure of the document to a third person, who shall be nameless, would bring in question the honor of a personage of most exalted station; and this fact gives the holder of the document an ascendancy over the illustrious personage whose honor and peace are so jeopardized."

"But this ascendancy," I interposed, "would depend upon the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber. Who would dare—"

"The thief," said G——, "is the Minister D——, who dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man. The method of the theft was not less ingenious than bold. The document in question—a letter, to be frank—had been received by the personage robbed while alone in the royal boudoir. During its perusal she was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of the other exalted personage, from whom especially it was her wish to conceal it. After a hurried and vain endeavor to thrust it in a drawer, she was forced to place it, open as it was, upon a table. The address, however, was uppermost, and, the contents thus unexposed, the letter escaped notice. At this juncture enters the Minister D——. His lynx eye immediately perceives the paper, recognizes the handwriting of the address, observes the confusion of the personage addressed, and fathoms her secret. After some business transaction, hurried through in his ordinary manner, he produces a letter somewhat similar to the one in question, opens it, pretends to read it, and then places it in close juxtaposition to the other. Again he converses for some fifteen minutes upon the public affairs. At length, in taking leave, he takes

also from the table the letter to which he had no claim. Its rightful owner saw, but, of course, dared not call attention to the act, in the presence of the third personage, who stood at her elbow. The Minister decamped, leaving his own letter—one of no importance—upon the table."

"Here, then," said Dupin to me, "you have precisely what you demand to make the ascendancy complete—the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber."

"Yes," replied the Prefect, "and the power thus attained has, for some months past, been wielded, for political purposes, to a very dangerous extent. The personage robbed is more thoroughly convinced, every day, of the necessity of reclaiming her letter. But this, of course, cannot be done openly. In fine, driven to despair, she has committed the matter to me."

"Than whom," said Dupin, amid a perfect whirlwind of smoke, "no more sagacious agent could, I suppose, be desired, or even imagined."

"You flatter me," replied the Prefect, "but it is possible that some such opinion may have been entertained."

"It is clear," said I, "as you observe, that the letter is still in possession of the Minister; since it is this possession, and not any employment of the letter, which bestows the power. With the employment the power departs."

"True," said G——; "and upon this conviction I proceeded. My first care was to make thorough search of the Minister's Hotel; and here my chief embarrassment lay in the necessity of searching without his knowledge. Beyond all things, I have been warned

of the danger which would result from giving him reason to suspect our design."

"But," said I, "you are quite *au fait* in these investigations. The Parisian police have done this thing often before."

"Oh, yes; and for this reason I did not despair. The habits of the Minister gave me, too, a great advantage. He is frequently absent from home all night. His servants are by no means numerous. They sleep at a distance from their master's apartment, and, being chiefly Neapolitans, are readily made drunk. I have keys, as you know, with which I can open any chamber or cabinet in Paris. For three months a night has not passed, during the greater part of which I have not been engaged, personally, in ransacking the D—— Hotel. My honor is interested, and, to mention a great secret, the reward is enormous. So I did not abandon the search until I had become fully satisfied that the thief is a more astute man than myself. I fancy that I have investigated every nook and corner of the premises in which it is possible that the paper can be concealed."

"But is it not possible," I suggested, "that although the letter may be in possession of the Minister, as it unquestionably is, he may have concealed it elsewhere than upon his own premises?"

"This is barely possible," said Dupin. "The present peculiar condition of affairs at court, and especially of those intrigues in which D—— is known to be involved, would render the instant availability of the document—its susceptibility of being produced at a moment's notice—a point of nearly equal importance with its possession."

"Its susceptibility of being produced?" said I.

"That is to say, of being *destroyed*," said Dupin.

"True," I observed; "the paper is clearly then upon the premises. As for its being upon the person of the Minister, we may consider that as out of the question."

"Entirely," said the Prefect. "He has been twice waylaid, as if by footpads, and his person rigorously searched under my own inspection."

"You might have spared yourself this trouble," said Dupin. "D——, I presume, is not altogether a fool, and, if not, must have anticipated these waylayings, as a matter of course."

"Not *altogether* a fool," said G——, "but then he's a poet, which I take to be only one remove from a fool."

"True," said Dupin, after a long and thoughtful whiff from his meerschaum, "although I have been guilty of certain doggerel myself."

"Suppose you detail," said I, "the particulars of your search."

"Why, the fact is, we took our time, and we searched *everywhere*. I have had long experience in these affairs. I took the entire building, room by room, devoting the nights of a whole week to each. We examined, first, the furniture of each apartment. We opened every possible drawer; and I presume you know that, to a properly trained police agent, such a thing as a *secret* drawer is impossible. Any man is a dolt who permits a 'secret' drawer to escape him in a search of this kind. The thing is *so* plain. There is a certain amount of bulk—of space—to be accounted for in every cabinet. Then we have accurate rules.

The fiftieth part of a line could not escape us. After the cabinets we took the chairs. The cushions we probed with fine long needles you have seen me employ. From the tables we removed the tops."

"Why so?"

"Sometimes the top of a table, or other similarly arranged piece of furniture, is removed by the person wishing to conceal an article; then the leg is excavated, the article deposited within the cavity, and the top replaced. The bottoms and tops of bedposts are employed in the same way."

"But could not the cavity be detected by sounding?" I asked.

"By no means, if, when the article is deposited, a sufficient wadding of cotton be placed around it. Besides, in our case we were obliged to proceed without noise."

"But you could not have removed—you could not have taken to pieces *all* articles of furniture in which it would have been possible to make a deposit in the manner you mention. A letter may be compressed into a thin spiral roll, not differing much in shape or bulk from a large knitting needle, and in this form it might be inserted into the rung of a chair, for example. You did not take to pieces all the chairs?"

"Certainly not; but we did better—we examined the rungs of every chair in the Hotel, and indeed, the jointings of every description of furniture, by the aid of a most powerful microscope. Had there been any traces of recent disturbance we should not have failed to detect it instantly. A single grain of gimlet-dust, for example, would have been as obvious as an apple. Any disorder in the gluing—any unusual gaping in the joints—would have sufficed to insure detection."

"I presume you looked to the mirrors, between the boards and the plates, and you probed the beds and the bedclothes, as well as the curtains and carpets?"

"That, of course; and when we had absolutely completed every particle of the furniture in this way, then we examined the house itself. We divided its entire surface into compartments, which we numbered, so that none might be missed; then we scrutinized each individual square inch throughout the premises, including the two houses immediately adjoining, with the microscope, as before."

"The two houses adjoining!" I exclaimed; "you must have had a great deal of trouble."

"We had; but the reward offered is prodigious."

"You include the *grounds* about the houses?"

"All the grounds are paved with bricks. They gave us comparatively little trouble. We examined the moss between the bricks, and found it undisturbed."

"You looked among D——'s papers, of course, and into the books of the library?"

"Certainly; we opened every package and parcel; we not only opened every book, but we turned over every leaf in each volume, not contenting ourselves with a mere shake, according to the fashion of some of our police officers. We also measured the thickness of every book-*cover*, with the most accurate admeasurement, and applied to each the most jealous scrutiny of the miscroscope. Had any of the bindings been recently meddled with, it would have been utterly impossible that the fact should have escaped observation. Some five or six volumes, just from the hands of the binder, we carefully probed, longitudinally, with the needles."

"You explored the floors beneath the carpets?"

"Beyond doubt. We removed every carpet, and examined the boards with the microscope."

"And the paper on the walls?"

"Yes."

"You looked into the cellars?"

"We did."

"Then," I said, "you have been making a miscalculation, and the letter is *not* upon the premises, as you suppose."

"I fear you are right there," said the Prefect. "And now, Dupin, what would you advise me to do?"

"To make a thorough re-search of the premises."

"That is absolutely needless," replied G——. "I am not more sure that I breathe than I am that the letter is not at the Hotel."

"I have no better advice to give you," said Dupin.

"You have, of course, an accurate description of the letter?"

"Oh, yes!"—And here the Prefect, producing a memorandum-book, proceeded to read aloud a minute account of the internal, and especially of the external appearance of the missing document. Soon after finishing the perusal of this description, he took his departure, more entirely depressed in spirits than I had ever known the good gentleman before.

In about a month afterwards he paid us another visit, and found us occupied very nearly as before. He took a pipe and a chair and entered into some ordinary conversation. At length I said,—

"Well, but, G——, what of the purloined letter? I presume you have at last made up your mind that there is no such thing as overreaching the Minister?"

"Confound him, say I—yes; I made the re-examination, however, as Dupin suggested—but it was all labor lost, as I knew it would be."

"How much was the reward offered, did you say?" asked Dupin.

"Why, a very great deal—a *very* liberal reward—I don't like to say how much, precisely; but one thing I *will* say, that I wouldn't mind giving my individual check for fifty thousand francs to any one who could obtain me that letter. The fact is, it is becoming of more and more importance every day; and the reward has been lately doubled. If it were trebled, however, I could do no more than I have done."

"Why, yes," said Dupin, drawlingly, between the whiffs of his meerschaum, "I really—think, G——, you have not exerted yourself—to the utmost in this matter. You might—do a little more, I think, eh?"

"How?—in what way?"

"Why—puff, puff—you might—puff, puff—employ counsel in the matter, eh?—puff, puff, puff. Do you remember the story they tell of Abernethy?"

"No; hang Abernethy!"

"To be sure! hang him and welcome. But, once upon a time, a certain rich miser conceived the design of sponging upon this Abernethy for a medical opinion. Getting up, for this purpose, an ordinary conversation in a private company, he insinuated his case to the physician, as that of an imaginary individual.

"'We will suppose,' said the miser, 'that his symptoms are such and such; now, doctor, what would *you* have directed him to take?'

"'Take!' said Abernethy, 'why, take *advice*, to be sure.'"

"But," said the Prefect, a little discomposed, "I am *perfectly* willing to take advice, and to pay for it. I would *really* give fifty thousand francs to any one who would aid me in the matter."

"In that case," replied Dupin, opening a drawer, and producing a check-book, "you may as well fill me up a check for the amount mentioned. When you have signed it, I will hand you the letter."

I was astounded. The Prefect appeared absolutely thunder-stricken. For some minutes he remained speechless and motionless, looking incredulously at my friend with open mouth, and eyes that seemed starting from their sockets; then, apparently recovering himself in some measure, he seized a pen, and after several pauses and vacant stares, finally filled up and signed a check for fifty thousand francs, and handed it across the table to Dupin. The latter examined it carefully and deposited it in his pocket-book; then, unlocking an *escritoire*, took thence a letter and gave it to the Prefect. This functionary grasped it in a perfect agony of joy, opened it with a trembling hand, cast a rapid glance at its contents, and then, scrambling and struggling to the door, rushed at length unceremoniously from the room and from the house, without having uttered a syllable since Dupin had requested him to fill up the check.

When he had gone, my friend entered into some explanations.

"The Parisian police," he said, "are exceedingly able in their way. They are persevering, ingenious, cunning, and thoroughly versed in the knowledge which their duties seem chiefly to demand. Thus, when G—— detailed to us his mode of searching the

premises at the Hotel D——, I felt entire confidence in his having made a satisfactory investigation—so far as his labors extended."

"So far as his labors extended?" said I.

"Yes," said Dupin. "The measures adopted were not only the best of their kind, but carried out to absolute perfection. Had the letter been deposited within the range of their search, these fellows would, beyond a question, have found it."

I merely laughed—but he seemed quite serious in all that he said.

"The measures, then," he continued, "were good in their kind, and well executed; their defect lay in their being inapplicable to the case, and to the man. A certain set of highly ingenious resources are, with the Prefect, a sort of Procrustean bed to which he forcibly adapts his designs. But he perpetually errs by being too deep or too shallow, for the matter in hand; and many a schoolboy is a better reasoner than he. I knew one about eight years of age, whose success at guessing in the game of 'even and odd' attracted universal admiration. This game is simple, and is played with marbles. One player holds in his hand a number of these toys, and demands of another whether that number is even or odd. If the guess is right, the guesser wins one; if wrong, he loses one. The boy to whom I allude won all the marbles of the school. Of course he had some principle of guessing; and this lay in mere observation and admeasurement of the astuteness of his opponents. For example, an arrant simpleton is his opponent, and, holding up his closed hand asks, 'Are they even or odd?' Our schoolboy replies, 'odd,' and loses; but upon the second trial he wins, for

he then says to himself, 'the simpleton had them even upon the first trial, and his amount of cunning is just sufficient to make him have them odd upon the second; I will therefore guess odd;' he guesses odd, and wins. Now, with a simpleton a degree above the first he would have reasoned thus: 'This fellow finds that in the first instance I guessed odd, and, in the second, he will propose to himself, upon the first impulse, a simple variation from even to odd, as did the first simpleton; but then a second thought will suggest that this is too simple a variation, and finally he will decide upon putting it even as before. I will therefore guess even;' he guesses even, and wins. Now this mode of reasoning in the schoolboy, whom his fellows term 'lucky,'—what, in its last analysis, is it?"

"It is merely," I said, "an indentification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent."

"It is," said Dupin; "and, upon inquiring of the boy by what means he effected the *thorough* identification in which his success consisted, I received answer as follows: 'When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression.' This response of the schoolboy lies at the bottom of all the spurious profundity which has been attributed to Rochefoucauld, to La Bruyère, to Machiavelli, and to Campanella."

"And the identification," I said, "of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent, depends, if I un-

derstand you aright, upon the accuracy with which the opponent's intellect is admeasured."

"For its practical value it depends upon this," replied Dupin, "and the Prefect and his cohort fail so frequently, first, by default of this identification, and, secondly, by ill-admeasurement, or rather through non-admeasurement, of the intellect with which they are engaged. They consider only their *own* ideas of ingenuity; and, in searching for anything hidden, advert only to the modes in which *they* would have hidden it. They are right in this much—that their own ingenuity is a faithful representative of that of *the mass*: but when the cunning of the individual felon is diverse in character from their own, the felon foils them, of course. This always happens when it is above their own, and very usually when it is below. They have no variation of principle in their investigations; at best, when urged by some unusual emergency—by some extraordinary reward—they extend or exaggerate their old modes of *practice*, without touching their principles. What, for example, in this case of D——, has been done to vary the principle of action? What is all this boring, and probing, and sounding, and scrutinizing with the miscrocope, and dividing the surface of the building into registered square inches—what is it all but an exaggeration *of the application* of the one principle or set of principles of search, which are based upon the one set of notions regarding human ingenuity, to which the Prefect, in the long routine of his duty, has been accustomed? Do you not see he has taken it for granted that *all* men proceed to conceal a letter,—not exactly in a gimlet-hole in a chair leg—but, at least, in *some* out-of-the-

way hole or corner suggested by the same tenor of thought which would urge a man to secrete a letter in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg? And do you not see, also, that such *recherchés* nooks for concealment are adapted only for ordinary occasions and would be adopted only by ordinary intellects; for, in all cases of concealment, a disposal of the article concealed—a disposal of it in this *recherché* manner—is, in the very first instance, presumable and presumed; and thus its discovery depends, not at all upon the acumen, but altogether upon the mere care, patience, and determination of the seekers; and where the case is of importance—or, what amounts to the same thing in policial eyes, when the reward is of magnitude—the qualities in question have *never* been known to fail. You will now understand what I meant in suggesting that, had the purloined letter been hidden anywhere within the limits of the Prefect's examination—in other words, had the principle of its concealment been comprehended within the principles of the Prefect—its discovery would have been a matter altogether beyond question. This functionary, however, has been thoroughly mystified; and the remote source of his defeat lies in the supposition that the Minister is a fool, because he has acquired renown as a poet. All fools are poets; this the Prefect *feels;* and he is merely guilty of a *non distributio medii* in thence inferring that all poets are fools."

"But is this really the poet?" I asked. "There are two brothers, I know; and both have attained reputation in letters. The Minister, I believe, has written learnedly on the Differential Calculus. He is a mathematician, and no poet."

"You are mistaken; I know him well; he is both. As poet *and* mathematician, he would reason well; as mere mathematician, he could not have reasoned at all, and thus would have been at the mercy of the Prefect."

"You surprise me," I said, "by these opinions, which have been contradicted by the voice of the world. You do not mean to set at naught the well-digested idea of centuries. The mathematical reason has long been regarded as *the* reason *par excellence*."

"'*Il y à parier*,'" replied Dupin, quoting from Chamfort, "'*que toute idée publique, toute convention reçue, est une sottise, car elle a convenue au plus grand nombre*.' The mathematicians, I grant you, have done their best to promulgate the popular error to which you allude, and which is none the less an error for its promulgation as truth. With an art worthy a better cause, for example, they have insinuated the term 'analysis' into application to algebra. The French are the originators of this particular deception; but if a term is of any importance—if words derive any value from applicability—then 'analysis' conveys 'algebra,' as much as, in Latin, '*ambitus*' implies 'ambition,' '*religio*,' 'religion,' or '*homines honesti*,' a set of honorable men."

"You have a quarrel on hand, I see," said I, "with some of the algebraists of Paris; but proceed."

"I dispute the availability, and thus the value, of that reason which is cultivated in any especial form other than the abstractly logical. I dispute, in particular, the reason educed by mathematical study. The mathematics are the science of form and quantity; mathematical reasoning is merely logic applied to observation upon form and quantity. The great error

lies in supposing that even the truths of what is called *pure* algebra are abstract or general truths. And this error is so egregious that I am confounded at the universality with which it has been received. Mathematical axioms are *not* axioms of general truth. What is true of *relation*—of form and quantity—is often grossly false in regard to morals, for example. In this latter science it is very usually *untrue* that the aggregated parts are equal to the whole. In chemistry also the axiom fails. In the consideration of motive it fails; for two motives, each of a given value, have not, necessarily, a value when united, equal to the sum of their values apart. There are numerous other mathematical truths which are only truths within the limits of *relation*. But the mathematician argues, from his *finite truths*, through habit, as if they were of an absolutely general applicability—as the world indeed imagines them to be. Bryant, in his very learned 'Mythology,' mentions an analogous source of error, when he says that 'although the Pagan fables are not believed, yet we forget ourselves continually, and make inferences from them as existing realities.' With the algebraists, however, who are Pagans themselves, the 'Pagan fables' *are* believed, and the inferences are made, not so much through lapse of memory, as through an unaccountable addling of the brains. In short, I never yet encountered the mere mathematician who could be trusted out of equal roots, or one who did not clandestinely hold it as a point of his faith that x^2+px was absolutely and unconditionally equal to q. Say to one of these gentlemen, by way of experiment, if you please, that you believe occasions may occur where x^2+px is *not* altogether equal to q, and,

having made him understand what you mean, get out of his reach as speedily as convenient, for, beyond doubt, he will endeavor to knock you down.

"I mean to say," continued Dupin, while I merely laughed at his last observations, "that if the Minister had been no more than a mathematician, the Prefect would have been under no necessity of giving me this check. I knew him, however, as both mathematician and poet, and my measures were adapted to his capacity, with reference to the circumstances by which he was surrounded. I knew him as courtier, too, and as a bold *intriguant*. Such a man, I considered, could not fail to be aware of the ordinary politicial modes of action. He could not have failed to anticipate—and events have proved that he did not fail to anticipate—the waylayings to which he was subjected. He must have foreseen, I reflected, the secret investigations of his premises. His frequent absences from home at night, which were hailed by the Prefect as certain aids to his success, I regarded only as ruses, to afford opportunity for thorough search to the police, and thus the sooner to impress them with the conviction to which G——, in fact, did finally arrive—the conviction that the letter was not upon the premises. I felt, also, that the whole train of thought, which I was at some pains in detailing to you just now, concerning the invariable principle of policial action in searches for articles concealed—I felt that this whole train of thought would necessarily pass through the mind of the Minister. It would imperatively lead him to despise all the ordinary *nooks* of concealment. *He* could not, I reflected, be so weak as not to see that the most intricate and remote recess of his Hotel would be as

open as his commonest closets to the eyes, to the probes, to the gimlets, and to the microscopes of the Prefect. I saw, in fine, that he would be driven, as a matter of course, to *simplicity,* if not deliberately induced to it as a matter of choice. You will remember, perhaps, how desperately the Prefect laughed when I suggested, upon our first interview, that it was just possible this mystery troubled him so much on account of its being so *very* self-evident."

"Yes," said I, "I remember his merriment well. I really thought he would have fallen into convulsions."

"The material world," continued Dupin, "abounds with very strict analogies to the immaterial; and thus some color of truth has been given to the rhetorical dogma, that metaphor, or simile, may be made to strengthen an argument, as well as to embellish a description. The principle of the *vis inertiæ* for example, seems to be identical in physics and metaphysics. It is not more true in the former, that a large body is with more difficulty set in motion than a smaller one, and that its subsequent momentum is commensurate with this difficulty, than it is, in the latter, that intellects of the vaster capacity, while more forcible, more constant, and more eventful in their movements than those of inferior grade, are yet the less readily moved, and more embarrassed and full of hesitation in the first few steps of their progress. Again: have you ever noticed which of the street signs, over the shop-doors, are the most attractive of attention?"

"I have never given the matter a thought," I said.

"There is a game of puzzles," he resumed, "which is played upon a map. One party playing requires another to find a given word—the name of town,

river, state, or empire—any word, in short, upon the motley and perplexed surface of the chart. A novice in the game generally seeks to embarrass his opponents by giving them the most minutely lettered names; but the adept selects such words as stretch, in large characters, from one end of the chart to the other. These, like the over-largely lettered signs and placards of the street, escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious; and here the physical oversight is precisely analogous with the moral inapprehension by which the intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident. But this is a point, it appears, somewhat above or beneath the understanding of the Prefect. He never once thought it probable, or possible, that the Minister had deposited the letter immediately beneath the nose of the whole world, by way of best preventing any portion of that world from perceiving it.

"But the more I reflected upon the daring, dashing, and discriminating ingenuity of D——; upon the fact that the document must always have been *at hand,* if he intended to use it to good purpose; and upon the decisive evidence, obtained by the Prefect, that it was not hidden within the limits of that dignitary's ordinary search—the more satisfied I became that, to conceal this letter, the Minister had resorted to the comprehensive and sagacious expedient of not attempting to conceal it at all.

"Full of these ideas, I prepared myself with a pair of green spectacles, and called one fine morning, quite by accident, at the Ministerial Hotel. I found D—— at home, yawning, lounging, and dawdling, as usual,

and pretending to be in the last extremity of ennui. He is, perhaps, the most really energetic human being now alive—but that is only when nobody sees him.

"To be even with him, I complained of my weak eyes, and lamented the necessity of the spectacles, under cover of which I cautiously and thoroughly surveyed the apartment, while seemingly intent only upon the conversation of my host.

"I paid especial attention to a large writing-table near which he sat, and upon which lay confusedly some miscellaneous letters and other papers, with one or two musical instruments and a few books. Here, however, after a long and very deliberate scrutiny, I saw nothing to excite particular suspicion.

"At length my eyes, in going the circuit of the room, fell upon a trumpery filigree card-rack of pasteboard, that hung dangling by a dirty blue ribbon from a little brass knob just beneath the middle of the mantlepiece. In this rack, which had three or four compartments, were five or six visiting cards and a solitary letter. This last was much soiled and crumpled. It was torn nearly in two, across the middle—as if a design, in the first instance, to tear it entirely up as worthless, had been altered, or stayed, in the second. It had a large black seal, bearing the D—— cipher *very* conspicuously, and was addressed, in a diminutive female hand, to D——, the Minister himself. It was thrust carelessly, and even, as it seemed, contemptuously, into one of the upper divisions of the rack.

"No sooner had I glanced at this letter, than I concluded it to be that of which I was in search. To be sure, it was, to all appearance, radically different from the one of which the Prefect had read us so minute a

description. Here the seal was large and black, with the D—— cipher; there it was small and red, with the ducal arms of the S—— family. Here the address, to the Minister, was diminutive and feminine; there the superscription, to a certain royal personage, was markedly bold and decided; the size alone formed a point of correspondence. But then, the *radicalness* of these differences, which was excessive; the dirt; the soiled and torn condition of the paper, so inconsistent with the *true* methodical habits of D——, and so suggestive of a design to delude the beholder into an idea of the worthlessness of the document; these things, together with the hyperobtrusive situation of this document, full in the view of every visitor, and thus exactly in accordance with the conclusions to which I had previously arrived; these things, I say, were strongly corroborative of suspicion, in one who came with the intention to suspect.

"I protracted my visit as long as possible, and, while I maintained a most animated discussion with the Minister, upon a topic which I knew well had never failed to interest and excite him, I kept my attention really riveted upon the letter. In this examination, I committed to memory its external appearance and arrangement in the rack; and also fell, at length, upon a discovery which set at rest whatever trivial doubt I might have entertained. In scrutinizing the edges of the paper, I observed them to be more *chafed* than seemed necessary. They presented the *broken* appearance which is manifested when a stiff paper, having been once folded and pressed with a folder, is refolded in a reversed direction, in the same creases or edges which had formed the original fold. This dis-

covery was sufficient. It was clear to me that the letter had been turned, as a glove, inside out, re-directed, and resealed. I bade the Minister good-morning, and took my departure at once, leaving a gold snuff-box upon the table.

"The next morning I called for the snuff-box, when we resumed, quite eagerly, the conversation of the preceding day. While thus engaged, however, a loud report, as if of a pistol, was heard immediately beneath the windows of the Hotel, and was succeeded by a series of fearful screams, and the shoutings of a mob. D—— rushed to a casement, threw it open, and looked out. In the meantime, I stepped to the card-rack, took the letter, put it in my pocket, and replaced it by a facsimile (so far as regards externals), which I had carefully prepared at my lodgings—imitating the D—— cipher, very readily, by means of a seal formed of bread.

"The disturbance in the street had been occasioned by the frantic behavior of a man with a musket. He had fired it among a crowd of women and children. It proved, however, to have been without ball, and the fellow was suffered to go his way as a lunatic or a drunkard. When he had gone, D—— came from the window, whither I had followed him immediately upon securing the object in view. Soon afterwards I bade him farewell. The pretended lunatic was a man in my own pay."

"But what purpose had you," I asked, "in replacing the letter by a facsimile? Would it not have been better, at the first visit, to have seized it openly, and departed?"

"D——," replied Dupin, "is a desperate man, and a

man of nerve. His Hotel, too, is not without attendants devoted to his interest. Had I made the wild attempt you suggest, I might never have left the Ministerial presence alive. The good people of Paris might have heard of me no more. But I had an object apart from these considerations. You know my political prepossessions. In this matter, I act as a partisan of the lady concerned. For eighteen months the Minister has had her in his power. She has now him in hers—since, being unaware that the letter is not in his possession, he will proceed with his exactions as if it was. Thus will he inevitably commit himself, at once, to his political destruction. His downfall, too, will not be more precipitate than awkward. It is all very well to talk about the *facilis descensus Averni;* but in all kinds of climbing, as Catalani said of singing, it is far more easy to get up than to come down. In the present instance I have no sympathy—at least no pity—for him who descends. He is that *monstrum horrendum,* an unprincipled man of genius. I confess, however, that I should like very well to know the precise character of his thoughts, when, being defied by her whom the Prefect terms 'a certain personage,' he is reduced to opening the letter which I left for him in the card-rack?"

"How? Did you put anything particular in it?"

"Why—it did not seem altogether right to leave the interior blank—that would have been insulting. D——, at Vienna once, did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-humoredly, that I should remember. So, as I knew he would feel some curiosity in regard to the identity of the person who had outwitted him, I thought it a pity not to give him a clew. He

is well acquainted with my MS., and I just copied into the middle of the blank sheet the words—

'—— Un dessein si funeste,
S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste.'

They are to be found in Crébillon's *Atrée*."

CHAPTER VI

The Frontiersman

I

Every one must have noticed in Poe's stories a tendency at times to become essays. Narration and exposition play hide-and-seek. O. Henry, in one of the last discussions that he had about his art, told of his perplexity in deciding whether to place his expository matter first or last in his stories. Poe has written a few masterpieces that it is customary to call "Tales" or "Essays." But while there is much narration in them, there is no plot; and the exposition that runs through them is hardly of the essay kind. It is in fact illumination rather than exposition. Though this chapter might be called "The Prose Poet" or "The Seer" or "The Philosopher," I prefer to entitle it "The Frontiersman." Each selection represents Poe as seeking for truth along those vast borderlands of speculation in which vision and intuition tread with firmer footing than smug logic or traditional philosophy.

There is more pure beauty in these sketches than is found in the majority of the short stories but not enough to justify metrical form or stanzaic division. In length, too, these poems in prose are midway between the poem proper and the recognized short story. Whatever you call them, you can not know Poe without knowing that he was more than a literary critic, a lyric poet, and the father of the short story. He was a frontiersman who found the old boundary lines of

type and form too restricted for the teeming visions and insistent questionings that pushed onward and upward for ampler spaces and keener winds. Came

> One everlasting Whisper day and night repeated—so:
> "Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look behind the Ranges—
> Something lost behind the Ranges. Lost and waiting for you. Go!"

Poe tried to "find it" and has left to us, if not the attained treasure behind the Ranges, at least the vision and the urge that sped him on the way.

"In reading and re-reading his collected works," says Arthur Ransome,[1] "I learnt that, perfect as his best things are, he has another title to immortality. It became clear that Poe's brain was more stimulating than his art, and that the tales and poems by which he is known were but the by-products of an unconcluded search. Throughout Poe's life he sought a philosophy of beauty that should also be a philosophy of life. He did not find it, and the unconcluded nature of his search is itself sufficient to explain his present vitality. Seekers rather than finders stimulate the imagination." In *The Power of Words* Poe makes Agathos say: "Ah, not in knowledge is happiness, but in the acquisition of knowledge! In forever knowing, we are forever blessed; but to know all were the curse of a fiend"—a thought in which Browning and Poe clasp hands.

Poe's mastery of English is more evident, I think, in his prose than in his poetry, and more evident in the selections that follow than in his stories. His tales of ratiocination, for example, his masterpieces of

[1] See his *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Study* (London, 1910), p. IX, a book of rare insight and knowledge.

the B type, show chiefly the logical side of the man and illustrate a zest and acumen in intellectual processes that have rarely formed any part of the dowry of poetic genius. The style, moreover, is sculptural. In his stories of the A type, the style is richer, being more plastic and more pictorial. But in these frontier sketches there is a blend of the sculptural and plastic and pictorial not equaled because not called for in the more purely narrative prose. There is the residuum of intellectual activity but the activity itself is kept in the background. We are distantly encompassed rather than immediately neighbored by it. Imagination takes the lead, and the language assumes a gravity, a somber beauty, a hymnic cadence, an utter identification with mood and thought that one finds heralded only in the purple patches of a Bacon, a Milton, a Jeremy Taylor, or a Sir Thomas Browne. If style be, as Lowell defines it, "the establishment of a perfect mutual understanding between the worker and his material," Poe found it at last in these soaring meditations that compass not only life and death, not only the natural and the supernatural, but also the dizzy arches that span the spaces between.

II

Let the main effort be as before to find the pivotal thought in each selection, and then to recognize and enjoy the art by which the central thought is illuminated rather than expounded. Separate passages will better repay study here than in the stories. But if a passage is taken out of its setting for any purpose, let it be put back and re-appraised as a part of a larger

whole before making the attempt to pass final judgment or to measure the intended effect.

SHADOW—A PARABLE (1835)

Yea! though I walk through the valley of the Shadow.—
PSALM OF DAVID.

[The conclusion of this meditation on death has been universally recognized as one of Poe's masterpieces of blended harmony. Brownell, who considers *Shadow* only a bit of "elaborate and hollow solemnity," concedes in the ending "a note of real pith and dignity." But to concede pith and dignity at the end is, in the case of Poe, to concede pith and dignity throughout; for the texture of the ending is the texture of the whole, and the form of the ending is only the whole massed and made convergent.]

Ye who read are still among the living; but I who write shall have long since gone my way into the region of shadows. For indeed strange things shall happen, and secret things be known, and many centuries shall pass away, ere these memorials be seen of men. And, when seen, there will be some to disbelieve and some to doubt, and yet a few who will find much to ponder upon in the characters here graven with a stylus of iron.

The year had been a year of terror, and of feelings more intense than terror for which there is no name upon the earth. For many prodigies and signs had taken place, and far and wide, over sea and land, the black wings of the Pestilence were spread abroad. To those, nevertheless, cunning in the stars, it was not

unknown that the heavens wore an aspect of ill; and to me, the Greek Oinos, among others, it was evident that now had arrived the alternation of that seven hundred and ninety-fourth year when, at the entrance of Aries, the planet Jupiter is conjoined with the red ring of the terrible Saturnus. The peculiar spirit of the skies, if I mistake not greatly, made itself manifest, not only in the physical orb of the earth, but in the souls, imaginations, and meditations of mankind.

Over some flasks of the red Chian wine, within the walls of a noble hall in a dim city called Ptolemais, we sat at night, a company of seven. And to our chamber there was no entrance save by a lofty door of brass; and the door was fashioned by the artisan Corinnos, and, being of rare workmanship, was fastened from within. Black draperies likewise, in the gloomy room, shut out from our view the moon, the lurid stars, and the peopleless streets; but the boding and the memory of Evil,—they would not be so excluded. There were things around us and about of which I can render no distinct account,—things material and spiritual; heaviness in the atmosphere, a sense of suffocation, anxiety, and, above all, that terrible state of existence which the nervous experience when the senses are keenly living and awake, and meanwhile the powers of thought lie dormant. A dead weight hung upon us. It hung upon our limbs, upon the household furniture, upon the goblets from which we drank; and all things were depressed and borne down thereby,—all things save only the flames of the seven iron lamps which illumined our revel. Uprearing themselves in tall slender lines of light, they thus remained burning, all pallid and motionless; and in

the mirror which their lustre formed upon the round table of ebony at which we sat, each of us there assembled beheld the pallor of his own countenance, and the unquiet glare in the downcast eyes of his companions. Yet we laughed and were merry in our proper way,—which was hysterical,—and sang the songs of Anacreon,—which are madness,—and drank deeply, although the purple wine reminded us of blood. For there was yet another tenant of our chamber in the person of young Zoïlus. Dead and at full length he lay, enshrouded, the genius and the demon of the scene. Alas! he bore no portion in our mirth, save that his countenance, distorted with the plague, and his eyes, in which Death had but half extinguished the fire of the pestilence, seemed to take such interest in our merriment as the dead may haply take in the merriment of those who are to die. But although I, Oinos, felt that the eyes of the departed were upon me, still I forced myself not to perceive the bitterness of their expression, and, gazing down steadily into the depths of the ebony mirror, sang with a loud and sonorous voice the songs of the son of Teios. But gradually my songs they ceased, and their echoes, rolling afar off among the sable draperies of the chamber, became weak and undistinguishable, and so faded away. And, lo! from among those sable draperies where the sounds of the song departed, there came forth a dark and undefined shadow,—a shadow such as the moon, when low in heaven, might fashion from the figure of a man; but it was the shadow neither of man nor of God, nor of any familiar thing. And, quivering awhile among the draperies of the room, it at length rested in full view upon the surface of the

door of brass. But the shadow was vague and formless and indefinite, and was the shadow neither of man nor of God—neither God of Greece, nor God of Chaldæa, nor any Egyptian God. And the shadow rested upon the brazen doorway, and under the arch of the entablature of the door, and moved not, nor spoke any word, but there became stationary and remained. And the door whereupon the shadow rested was, if I remember aright, over against the feet of the young Zoïlus enshrouded. But we, the seven there assembled, having seen the shadow as it came out from among the draperies, dared not steadily behold it, but cast down our eyes, and gazed continually into the depths of the mirror of ebony. And at length I, Oinos, speaking some low words, demanded of the shadow its dwelling and its appellation. And the shadow answered, "I am SHADOW, and my dwelling is near to the catacombs of Ptolemais, and hard by those dim plains of Helusion which border upon the foul Charonian canal." And then did we, the seven, start from our seats in horror, and stand trembling, and shuddering, and aghast: for the tones in the voice of the shadow were not the tones of any one being, but of a multitude of beings, and, varying in their cadences from syllable to syllable, fell duskily upon our ears in the well-remembered and familiar accents of many thousand departed friends.

SILENCE—A FABLE (1839)

Εὕδουσιν δ' ὀρέων κορυφαί τε καὶ φάραγγες,
Πρώονες τε καὶ χαράδραι.

ALCMAN: 60 [10] 646.

The mountain pinnacles slumber; valleys, crags, and caves *are silent.*

[The trend of the thought will be better understood if you call the selection "Desolation and Silence," for the fable is a dirge of noisy desolation succeeded by brooding and illimitable silence. As "the curse of tumult" marks the culmination of desolation, so "the curse of silence" heralds the coming of unbroken stillness. A phrase from *The Coliseum,* "Silence! and Desolation!", contains the stepping-stones of the fable, though in reversed order. The introduction of a single character "in the toga of old Rome" shows that Poe, as in *The Coliseum,* was thinking of desolation and silence against the background of Rome that was. He pictures here, however, not "the grandeur that was Rome" nor Roman memories.

Clothing us in a robe of more than glory.

The theme now is "the abomination of desolation" (*Matthew* 24:15). Ruin, in other words, is etched not as we see it through enhancing centuries of retrospect but "as an incubus upon our hearts, and a shadow upon our brain." The lynx mentioned in the last sentence is not a part of the Demon's story: he is a symbol of the persistent but futile questioning with which humanity has always fronted the silences of history.]

"Listen to *me,*" said the Demon, as he placed his hand upon my head. "The region of which I speak is a dreary region in Libya, by the borders of the river Zäire. And there is no quiet there, nor silence.

"The waters of the river have a saffron and sickly hue; and they flow not onward to the sea, but palpitate forever and forever beneath the red eye of the sun with a tumultuous and convulsive motion. For

many miles on either side of the river's oozy bed is a pale desert of gigantic water-lilies. They sigh one unto the other in that solitude, and stretch towards the heaven their long and ghastly necks, and nod to and fro their everlasting heads. And there is an indistinct murmur which cometh out from among them like the rushing of subterrene water. And they sigh one unto the other.

"But there is a boundary to their realm—the boundary of the dark, horrible, lofty forest. There, like the waves about the Hebrides, the low underwood is agitated continually. But there is no wind throughout the heaven. And the tall primeval trees rock eternally hither and thither with a crashing and mighty sound. And from their high summits, one by one, drop everlasting dews. And at the roots strange poisonous flowers lie writhing in perturbed slumber. And overhead, with a rustling and loud noise, the gray clouds rush westwardly forever, until they roll, a cataract, over the fiery wall of the horizon. But there is no wind throughout the heaven. And by the shores of the river Zäire there is neither quiet nor silence.

"It was night, and the rain fell; and, falling, it was rain, but having fallen, it was blood. And I stood in the morass among the tall lilies, and the rain fell upon my head—and the lilies sighed one unto the other in the solemnity of their desolation.

"And, all at once, the moon arose through the thin ghastly mist, and was crimson in color. And mine eyes fell upon a huge gray rock which stood by the shore of the river, and was lighted by the light of the moon. And the rock was gray, and ghastly, and tall, —and the rock was gray. Upon its front were char-

acters engraven in the stone; and I walked through the morass of water-lilies, until I came close unto the shore, that I might read the characters upon the stone. But I could not decipher them. And I was going back into the morass, when the moon shone with a fuller red, and I turned and looked again upon the rock, and upon the characters;—and the characters were DESOLATION.

"And I looked upwards, and there stood a man upon the summit of the rock; and I hid myself among the water-lilies that I might discover the actions of the man. And the man was tall and stately in form, and was wrapped up from his shoulders to his feet in the toga of old Rome. And the outlines of his figure were indistinct—but his features were the features of a deity; for the mantle of the night, and of the mist, and of the moon, and of the dew, had left uncovered the features of his face. And his brow was lofty with thought, and his eye wild with care; and in the few furrows upon his cheek I read the fables of sorrow, and weariness, and disgust with mankind, and a longing after solitude.

"And the man sat upon the rock, and leaned his head upon his hand, and looked out upon the desolation. He looked down into the low, unquiet shrubbery, and up into the tall primeval trees, and up higher at the rustling heaven, and into the crimson moon. And I lay close within shelter of the lilies, and observed the actions of the man. And the man trembled in the solitude;—but the night waned, and he sat upon the rock.

"And the man turned his attention from the heaven, and looked out upon the dreary river Zäire, and upon

the yellow ghastly waters, and upon the pale legions of the water-lilies. And the man listened to the sighs of the water-lilies, and to the murmur that came up from among them. And I lay close within my covert and observed the actions of the man. And the man trembled in the solitude:—but the night waned, and he sat upon the rock.

"Then I went down into the recesses of the morass, and waded afar in among the wilderness of the lilies and called unto the hippopotami which dwelt among the fens in the recesses of the morass. And the hippopotami heard my call, and came, with the behemoth, unto the foot of the rock, and roared loudly and fearfully beneath the moon. And I lay close within my covert and observed the actions of the man. And the man trembled in the solitude:—but the night waned and he sat upon the rock.

"Then I cursed the elements with the curse of tumult; and a frightful tempest gathered in the heaven, where before there had been no wind. And the heaven became livid with the violence of the tempest—and the rain beat upon the head of the man—and the floods of the river came down—and the river was tormented into foam—and the water-lilies shrieked within their beds—and the forest crumbled before the wind—and the thunder rolled—and the lightning fell—and the rock rocked to its foundation. And I lay close within my covert and observed the actions of the man. And the man trembled in the solitude:—but the night waned, and he sat upon the rock.

"Then I grew angry and cursed, with the curse of *silence*, the river, and the lilies, and the wind, and the forest, and the heaven, and the thunder, and the sighs

of the water-lilies. And they became accursed, and *were still*. And the moon ceased to totter up its pathway to heaven—and the thunder died away—and the lightning did not flash—and the clouds hung motionless—and the waters sunk to their level and remained —and the trees ceased to rock—and the water-lilies sighed no more—and the murmur was heard no longer from among them, nor any shadow of sound throughout the vast illimitable desert. And I looked upon the characters of the rock, and they were changed;—and the characters were SILENCE.

"And mine eyes fell upon the countenance of the man, and his countenance was wan with terror. And, hurriedly, he raised his head from his hand, and stood forth upon the rock and listened. But there was no voice throughout the vast illimitable desert, and the characters upon the rock were SILENCE. And the man shuddered, and turned his face away, and fled afar off, in haste, so that I beheld him no more."

* * * * * * *

Now there are fine tales in the volumes of the Magi —in the iron-bound, melancholy volumes of the Magi. Therein, I say, are glorious histories of the Heaven, and of the Earth, and of the mighty Sea—and of the Genii that overruled the sea, and the earth, and the lofty heaven. There was much lore too in the sayings which were said by the Sybils; and holy, holy things were heard of old by the dim leaves that trembled around Dodona—but, as Allah liveth, that fable which the Demon told me, as he sat by my side in the shadow of the tomb, I hold to be the most wonderful of all! And as the Demon made an end of his story, he fell back within the cavity of the tomb and

laughed. And I could not laugh with the Demon, and he cursed me because I could not laugh. And the lynx, which dwelleth forever in the tomb, came out therefrom, and lay down at the feet of the Demon, and looked at him steadily in the face.

THE CONVERSATION OF EIROS AND CHARMION (1839)

Πῦρ σοι προσοίσω.

I will bring fire to thee.
EURIPIDES, *Androm.* [257.]

[The conversation pre-supposes the fulfillment of those "passages in the most holy writings which speak of the final destruction of all things by fire." Charmion and Eiros meet in the other world. Charmion has been an immortal for ten years but Eiros is new-fledged with immortality, having met death only a few days before in the universal conflagration. Charmion knows only the bare fact of the catastrophe and is eager to learn the details. Eiros's description seems to me unparalleled even in Poe's works for a certain lurid vividness and sense of flame-licked intensity. The best touches are the increased "elasticity of frame and vivacity of mind" as the comet approached and "the wild luxuriance of foliage, utterly unknown before."]

Eiros. Why do you call me Eiros?

Charmion. So henceforward will you always be called. You must forget, too, *my* earthly name, and speak to me as Charmion.

Eiros. This is indeed no dream!

Charmion. Dreams are with us no more;—but of

these mysteries anon. I rejoice to see you looking life-like and rational. The film of the shadow has already passed from off your eyes. Be of heart, and fear nothing. Your allotted days of stupor have expired; and, to-morrow, I will myself induct you into the full joys and wonders of your novel existence.

Eiros. True—I feel no stupor—none at all. The wild sickness and the terrible darkness have left me, and I hear no longer that mad, rushing, horrible sound, like the "voice of many waters." Yet my senses are bewildered, Charmion, with the keenness of their perception of *the new*.

Charmion. A few days will remove all this;—but I fully understand you, and feel for you. It is now ten earthly years since I underwent what you undergo—yet the remembrance of it hangs by me still. You have now suffered all of pain, however, which you will suffer in Aidenn.

Eiros. In Aidenn?

Charmion. In Aidenn.

Eiros. Oh God!—pity me, Charmion!—I am overburthened with the majesty of all things—of the unknown now known—of the speculative Future merged in the august and certain Present.

Charmion. Grapple not now with such thoughts. To-morrow we will speak of this. Your mind wavers, and its agitation will find relief in the exercise of simple memories. Look not around, nor forward—but back. I am burning with anxiety to hear the details of that stupendous event which threw you among us. Tell me of it. Let us converse of familiar things, in the old familiar language of the world which has so fearfully perished.

Eiros. Most fearfully, fearfully!—this in indeed no dream.

Charmion. Dreams are no more. Was I much mourned, my Eiros?

Eiros. Mourned, Charmion?—oh deeply. To that last hour of all, there hung a cloud of intense gloom and devout sorrow over your household.

Charmion. And that last hour—speak of it. Remember that, beyond the naked fact of the catastrophe itself, I know nothing. When, coming out from among mankind, I passed into Night through the Grave—at that period, if I remember aright, the calamity which overwhelmed you was utterly unanticipated. But, indeed, I knew little of the speculative philosophy of the day.

Eiros. The individual calamity was, as you say, entirely unanticipated; but analogous misfortunes had been long a subject of discussion with astronomers. I need scarce tell you, my friend, that, even when you left us, men had agreed to understand those passages in the most holy writings which speak of the final destruction of all things by fire, as having reference to the orb of the earth alone. But in regard to the immediate agency of the ruin, speculation had been at fault from that epoch in astronomical knowledge in which the comets were divested of the terrors of flame. The very moderate density of these bodies had been well establishd. They had been observed to pass among the satellites of Jupiter, without bringing about any sensible alteration either in the masses or in the orbits of these secondary planets. We had long regarded the wanderers as vapoury creations of inconceivable tenuity, and as altogether incapable of doing

injury to our substantial globe, even in the event of contact. But contact was not in any degree dreaded; for the elements of all the comets were accurately known. That among *them* we should look for the agency of the threatened fiery destruction had been for many years considered an inadmissible idea. But wonders and wild fancies had been, of late days, strangely rife among mankind; and, although it was only with a few of the ignorant that actual apprehension prevailed, upon the announcement by astronomers of a *new* comet, yet this announcement was generally received with I know not what of agitation and mistrust.

The elements of the strange orb were immediately calculated, and it was at once conceded by all observers, that its path, at perihelion, would bring it into very close proximity with the earth. There were two or three astronomers, of secondary note, who resolutely maintained that a contact was inevitable. I cannot very well express to you the effect of this intelligence upon the people. For a few short days they would not believe an assertion which their intellect, so long employed among worldly considerations, could not in any manner grasp. But the truth of a vitally important fact soon makes its way into the understanding of even the most stolid. Finally, all men saw that astronomical knowledge lied not, and they awaited the comet. Its approach was not, at first, seemingly rapid; nor was its appearance of very unusual character. It was of a dull red, and had little perceptible train. For seven or eight days we saw no material increase in its apparent diameter, and but a partial alteration in its colour. Meantime, the ordinary

affairs of men were discarded, and all interests absorbed in a growing discussion, instituted by the philosophic, in respect to the cometary nature. Even the grossly ignorant aroused their sluggish capacities to such considerations. The learned *now* gave their intellect—their soul—to no such points as the allaying of fear, or to the sustenance of loved theory. They sought—they panted for right views. They groaned for perfected knowledge. *Truth* arose in the purity of her strength and exceeding majesty, and the wise bowed down and adored.

That material injury to our globe or to its inhabitants would result from the apprehended contact, was an opinion which hourly lost ground among the wise; and the wise were now freely permitted to rule the reason and the fancy of the crowd. It was demonstrated, that the density of the comet's *nucleus* was far less than that of our rarest gas; and the harmless passage of a similar visitor among the satellites of Jupiter was a point strongly insisted upon, and which served greatly to allay terror. Theologists, with an earnestness fear-enkindled, dwelt upon the biblical prophecies, and expounded them to the people with a directness and simplicity of which no previous instance had been known. That the final destruction of the earth must be brought about by the agency of fire, was urged with a spirit that enforced everywhere conviction; and that the comets were of no fiery nature (as all men now knew) was a truth which relieved all, in a great measure, from the apprehension of the great calamity foretold. It is noticeable that the popular prejudices and vulgar errors in regard to pestilence and wars—errors which were wont to prevail upon every appear-

ance of a comet—were now altogether unknown. As if by some sudden convulsive exertion, reason had at once hurled superstition from her throne. The feeblest intellect had derived vigour from excessive interest.

What minor evils might arise from the contact were points of elaborate question. The learned spoke of slight geological disturbances, of probable alterations in climate, and consequently in vegetation; of possible magnetic and electric influences. Many held that no visible or perceptible effect would in any manner be produced. While such discussions were going on, their subject gradually approached, growing larger in apparent diameter, and of a more brilliant lustre. Mankind grew paler as it came. All human operations were suspended.

There was an epoch in the course of the general sentiment when the comet had attained, at length, a size surpassing that of any previously recorded visitation. The people now, dismissing any lingering hope that the astronomers were wrong, experienced all the certainty of evil. The chimerical aspect of their terror was gone. The hearts of the stoutest of our race beat violently within their bosoms. A very few days sufficed, however, to merge even such feelings in sentiments more unendurable. We could no longer apply to the strange orb any *accustomed* thoughts. Its *historical* attributes had disappeared. It oppressed us with a hideous *novelty* of emotion. We saw it not as an astronomical phenomenon in the heavens, but as an incubus upon our hearts, and a shadow upon our brains. It had taken, with inconceivable rapidity, the character of a gigantic mantle of rare flame, extending from horizon to horizon.

Yet a day, and men breathed with greater freedom. It was clear that we were already within the influence of the comet; yet we lived. We even felt an unusual elasticity of frame and vivacity of mind. The exceeding tenuity of the object of our dread was apparent; for all heavenly objects were plainly visible through it. Meantime, our vegetation had perceptibly altered; and we gained faith, from this predicted circumstance, in the foresight of the wise. A wild luxuriance of foliage, utterly unknown before, burst out upon every vegetable thing.

Yet another day—and the evil was not altogether upon us. It was now evident that its nucleus would first reach us. A wild change had come over all men; and the first sense of *pain* was the wild signal for general lamentation and horror. This first sense of pain lay in a rigorous constriction of the breast and lungs, and an insufferable dryness of the skin. It could not be denied that our atmosphere was radically affected; the conformation of this atmosphere and the possible modifications to which it might be subjected, were now the topics of discussion. The result of investigation sent an electric thrill of the intensest terror through the universal heart of man.

It had been long known that the air which encircled us was a compound of oxygen and nitrogen gases, in the proportion of twenty-one measures of oxygen, and seventy-nine of nitrogen, in every one hundred of the atmosphere. Oxygen, which was the principle of combustion, and the vehicle of heat, was absolutely necessary to the support of animal life, and was the most powerful and energetic agent in nature. Nitrogen, on the contrary, was incapable of supporting either animal

life or flame. An unnatural excess of oxygen would result, it had been ascertained, in just such an elevation of the animal spirits as we had latterly experienced. It was the pursuit, the extension of the idea, which had engendered awe. What would be the result of a total extraction of the nitrogen? A combustion irresistible, all-devouring, omni-prevalent, immediate;—the entire fulfilment, in all their minute and terrible details, of the fiery and horror-inspiring denunciations of the prophecies of the Holy Book.

Why need I paint, Charmion, the now disenchained phrenzy of mankind? That tenuity in the comet which had previously inspired us with hope, was now the source of the bitterness of despair. In its impalpable gaseous character we clearly perceived the consummation of Fate. Meantime a day again passed—bearing away with it the last shadow of Hope. We gasped in the rapid modification of the air. The red blood bounded tumultuously through its strict channels. A furious delirium possessed all men; and, with arms rigidly outstretched towards the threatening heavens, they trembled and shrieked aloud. But the nucleus of the destroyer was now upon us;—even here in Aidenn, I shudder while I speak. Let me be brief—brief as the ruin that overwhelmed. For a moment there was a wild lurid light alone, visiting and penetrating all things. Then let us bow down, Charmion, before the excessive majesty of the great God!—then, there came a shouting and pervading sound, as if from the mouth itself of HIM; while the whole incumbent mass of ether in which we existed, burst at once into a species of intense flame, for whose surpassing brilliancy and all-fervid heat even the angels in the high Heaven of pure knowledge have no name. Thus ended all.

THE ISLAND OF THE FAY (1841)

Nullus enim locus sine genio est.—SERVIUS.

[In his *Sonnet—To Science* (1829), Poe had asked:

> Hast thou not torn the Naiad from her flood,
> The Elfin from the green grass, and from me
> The summer dream beneath the tamarind tree?

But here is a dream beneath the tamarind tree and a vision of a Naiad on her flood, in spite of science. Every passing of a Fay, every incursion of science into the domain of nature-worship, every victory won by knowledge over beauty and the shaping imagination is a diminution of the light of life and an enlargement of the encompassing shadow. "Is it dream or reality?" asks Lauvrière. It is both. The second paragraph shows its author's nature-piety at its best.]

"La musique," says Marmontel, in those "Contes Moraux"[2] which, in all our translations, we have insisted upon calling "Moral Tales" as if in mockery of their spirit—*"la musique est le seul des talens qui jouissent de lui-même; tous les autres veulent des témoins."* He here confounds the pleasure derivable from sweet sounds with the capacity for creating them. No more than any other *talent,* is that for music susceptible of complete enjoyment, where there is no second party to appreciate its exercise. And it is only in common with other talents that it produces *effects* which may be fully enjoyed in solitude. The idea which the *raconteur* has either failed to entertain

[2] *Moraux* is here derived from *moeurs* and its meaning is "*fashionable,*" or, more strictly, "of manners." (Poe's Note.)

clearly, or has sacrificed in its expression to his national love of *point*, is, doubtless, the very tenable one that the higher order of music is the most thoroughly estimated when we are exclusively alone. The proposition in this form will be admitted at once by those who love the lyre for its own sake, and for its spiritual uses.

But there is one pleasure still within the reach of fallen mortality—and perhaps only one—which owes even more than does music to the accessory sentiment of seclusion. I mean the happiness experienced in the contemplation of natural scenery. In truth, the man who would behold aright the glory of God upon earth must in solitude behold that glory. To me, at least, the presence—not of human life only—but of life in any other form than that of the green things which grow upon the soil and are voiceless—is a stain upon the landscape—is at war with the genius of the scene. I love, indeed, to regard the dark valleys, and the grey rocks, and the waters that silently smile, and the forests that sigh in uneasy slumbers, and the proud watchful mountains that look down upon all—I love to regard these as themselves but the colossal members of one vast animate and sentient whole—a whole whose form (that of the sphere) is the most perfect and most inclusive of all; whose path is among associate planets; whose meek handmaiden is the moon; whose mediate sovereign is the sun; whose life is eternity; whose thought is that of a God; whose enjoyment is knowledge; whose destinies are lost in immensity; whose cognizance of ourselves is akin with our own cognizance of the *animalculæ* which infest the brain—a being which we, in consequence, regard

as purely inanimate and material, much in the same manner as these *animalculæ* must thus regard us.

Our telescopes and our mathematical investigations assure us on every hand—notwithstanding the cant of the more ignorant of the priesthood—that space, and therefore that bulk, is an important consideration in the eyes of the Almighty. The cycles in which the stars move are those best adapted for the evolution, without collision, of the greatest possible number of bodies. The forms of those bodies are accurately such as, within a given surface, to include the greatest possible amount of matter; —while the surfaces themselves are so disposed as to accommodate a denser population than could be accommodated on the same surfaces otherwise arranged. Nor is it any argument against bulk being an object with God, that space itself is infinite; for there may be an infinity of matter to fill it. And since we see clearly that the endowment of matter with vitality is a principle—indeed as far as our judgments extend, the *leading* principle in the operations of Deity —it is scarcely logical to imagine it confined to the regions of the minute, where we daily trace it, and not extending to those of the august. As we find cycle within cycle without end—yet all revolving around one far-distant centre which is the Godhead, may we not analogically suppose, in the same manner, life within life, the less within the greater, and all within the Spirit Divine? In short, we are madly erring, through self-esteem, in believing man, in either his temporal or future destinies, to be of more moment in the universe than that vast "clod of the valley" which he tills and contemns, and to which he denies a soul

for no more profound reason than that he does not behold it in operation.[3]

These fancies, and such as these, have always given to my meditations among the mountains, and the forests, by the rivers and the ocean, a tinge of what the every-day world would not fail to term the fantastic. My wanderings amid such scenes have been many, and far-searching, and often solitary; and the interest with which I have strayed through many a dim deep valley, or gazed into the reflected Heaven of many a bright lake, has been an interest greatly deepened by the thought that I have strayed and gazed *alone*. What flippant Frenchman[4] was it who said, in allusion to the well-known work of Zimmerman, that, *"la solitude est une belle chose; mais il faut quelqu' un pour vous dire que la solitude est une belle chose."* The epigram cannot be gainsaid; but the necessity is a thing that does not exist.

It was during one of my lonely journeyings, amid a far-distant region of mountain locked within mountain, and sad rivers and melancholy tarns writhing or sleeping within all—that I chanced upon a certain rivulet and island. I came upon them suddenly in the leafy June, and threw myself upon the turf, beneath the branches of an unknown odorous shrub, that I might doze as I contemplated the scene. I felt that thus only should I look upon it—such was the character of phantasm which it wore.

On all sides—save to the west, where the sun was

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[3]Speaking of the tides, Pomponius Mela, in his treatise *"De Situ Orbis,"* says "either the world is a great animal, or" etc. (Poe's Note.)

[4]Balzac—in substance—I do not remember the words. (Poe's Note.)

about sinking—arose the verdant walls of the forest. The little river which turned sharply in its course, and was thus immediately lost to sight, seemed to have no exit from its prison, but to be absorbed by the deep green foliage of the trees to the east—while in the opposite quarter (so it appeared to me as I lay at length and glanced upward) there poured down noiselessly and continuously into the valley, a rich golden and crimson water-fall from the sunset fountains of the sky.

About midway in the short vista which my dreamy vision took in, one small circular island, profusely verdured, reposed upon the bosom of the stream.

> So blended bank and shadow there,
> That each seemed pendulous in air—

so mirror-like was the glassy water, that it was scarcely possible to say at what point upon the slope of the emerald turf its crystal dominion began.

My position enabled me to include in a single view both the eastern and western extremities of the islet; and I observed a singularly-marked difference in their aspects. The latter was all one radiant harem of garden beauties. It glowed and blushed beneath the eye of the slant sunlight, and fairly laughed with flowers. The grass was short, springy, sweet-scented, and Asphodel-interspersed. The trees were lithe, mirthful, erect—bright, slender and graceful—of eastern figure and foliage, with bark smooth, glossy, and parti-colored. There seemed a deep sense of life and joy about all; and although no airs blew from out the Heavens, yet everything had motion through the gentle sweepings to and fro of innumerable butterflies, that might have been mistaken for tulips with wings.[5]

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[5]Florem putares nare per liquidum aethera.—P. Commire. (Poe's Note.)

The other or eastern end of the isle was whelmed in the blackest shade. A sombre, yet beautiful and peaceful gloom here pervaded all things. The trees were dark in color and mournful in form and attitude —wreathing themselves into sad, solemn, and spectral shapes, that conveyed ideas of mortal sorrow and untimely death. The grass wore the deep tint of the cypress, and the heads of its blades hung droopingly, and, hither and thither among it, were many small unsightly hillocks, low, and narrow, and not very long, that had the aspect of graves, but were not; although over and all about them the rue and rosemary clambered. The shade of the trees fell heavily upon the water, and seemed to bury itself therein, impregnating the depths of the element with darkness. I fancied that each shadow, as the sun descended lower and lower, separated itself sullenly from the trunk that gave it birth, and thus became absorbed by the stream; while other shadows issued momently from the trees, taking the place of their predecessors thus entombed.

This idea, having once seized upon my fancy, greatly excited it, and I lost myself forthwith in reverie. "If ever island were enchanted,"—said I to myself—"this is it. This is the haunt of the few gentle Fays who remain from the wreck of the race. Are these green tombs theirs?—or do they yield up their sweet lives as mankind yield up their own? In dying, do they not rather waste away mournfully; rendering unto God little by little their existence, as these trees render up shadow after shadow, exhausting their substance unto dissolution? What the wasting tree is to the water that imbibes its shade, growing thus blacker by what it preys upon, may not the life of the Fay be to the death which engulfs it?"

As I thus mused, with half-shut eyes, while the sun sank rapidly to rest, and eddying currents careered round and round the island, bearing upon their bosom large, dazzling, white flakes of the bark of the sycamore—flakes which, in their multiform positions upon the water, a quick imagination might have converted into anything it pleased—while I thus mused, it appeared to me that the form of one of those very Fays about whom I had been pondering, made its way slowly into the darkness from out the light at the western end of the island. She stood erect, in a singularly fragile canoe, and urged it with the mere phantom of an oar. While within the influence of the lingering sunbeams, her attitude seemed indicative of joy—but sorrow deformed it as she passed within the shade. Slowly she glided along, and at length rounded the islet and re-entered the region of light. "The revolution which has just been made by the Fay," continued I musingly—"is the cycle of the brief year of her life.

"She has floated through her winter and through her summer. She is a year nearer unto Death: for I did not fail to see that as she came into the shade, her shadow fell from her, and was swallowed up in the dark water, making its blackness more black."

And again the boat appeared, and the Fay; but about the attitude of the latter there was more of care and uncertainty, and less of elastic joy. She floated again from out the light, and into the gloom (which deepened momently) and again her shadow fell from her into the ebony water, and became absorbed into its blackness. And again and again she made the circuit of the island, (while the sun rushed down to his

slumbers) and at each issuing into the light, there was more sorrow about her person, while it grew feebler, and far fainter, and more indistinct; and at each passage into the gloom, there fell from her a darker shade, which became whelmed in a shadow more black. But at length, when the sun had utterly departed, the Fay now the mere ghost of her former self, went disconsolately with her boat into the region of the ebony flood, —and that she issued thence at all I cannot say,—for darkness fell over all things, and I beheld her magical figure no more.

THE COLLOQUY OF MONOS AND UNA (1841)

Μέλλοντα ταῦτα.

These things are in the future.
SOPHOCLES, *Antig.* [1334]

[This is a companion piece to *The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion.* Monos died first but Una soon followed him. A century has passed and they are together again. Monos has just said: "That man, as a race, should not become extinct, I saw that he must be *'born again.'* " On the meaning of the two words the colloquy begins. Monos's last speech, telling what it means to die, that is, to be born again, is an earlier prose sketch of *For Annie.* See page 232. Of course the colloquy is more philosophic than the lyric, there being no place in verse for so subtle a thought as the birth of a sixth sense from the chaos of our mundane five. Note the Ruskinian flavor in: "Meantime huge smoking cities arose, innumerable. Green leaves shrank before the hot breath of furnaces. The fair face of Nature was deformed as with the ravages of some loathsome disease."]

Una. "Born again"?

Monos. Yes, fairest and best-beloved Una, "born again." These were the words upon whose mystical meaning I had so long pondered, rejecting the explanations of the priesthood, until Death himself resolved for me the secret.

Una. Death!

Monos. How strangely, sweet Una, you echo my words! I observe, too, a vacillation in your step—a joyous inquietude in your eyes. You are confused and oppressed by the majestic novelty of the Life Eternal. Yes, it was of Death I spoke. And here how singularly sounds that word which of old was wont to bring terror to all hearts—throwing a mildew upon all pleasures!

Una. Ah, Death, the spectre which sate at all feasts! How often, Monos, did we lose ourselves in speculations upon its nature! How mysteriously did it act as a check to human bliss—saying unto it "thus far, and no farther"! That earnest mutual love, my own Monos, which burned within our bosoms—how vainly did we flatter ourselves, feeling happy in its first up-springing, that our happiness would strengthen with its strength! Alas! as it grew, so grew in our hearts the dread of that evil hour which was hurrying to separate us forever! Thus, in time, it became painful to love. Hate would have been mercy then.

Monos. Speak not here of these griefs, dear Una —mine, mine forever now!

Una. But the memory of past sorrow—is it not present joy? I have much to say yet of the things which have been. Above all, I burn to know the inci-

dents of your own passage through the dark Valley and Shadow.

Monos. And when did the radiant Una ask any thing of her Monos in vain? I will be minute in relating all—but at what point shall the weird narrative begin?

Una. At what point?

Monos. You have said.

Una. Monos, I comprehend you. In Death we have both learned the propensity of man to define the indefinable. I will not say, then, commence with the moment of life's cessation—but commence with that sad, sad instant when, the fever having abandoned you, you sank into a breathless and motionless torpor, and I pressed down your pallid eyelids with the passionate fingers of love.

Monos. One word first, my Una, in regard to man's general condition at this epoch. You will remember that one or two of the wise among our forefathers—wise in fact, although not in the world's esteem—had ventured to doubt the propriety of the term "improvement," as applied to the progress of our civilization. There were periods in each of the five or six centuries immediately preceding our dissolution, when arose some vigorous intellect, boldly contending for those principles whose truth appears now, to our disenfranchised reason, so utterly obvious—principles which should have taught our race to submit to the guidance of the natural laws, rather than attempt their control. At long intervals some master-minds appeared, looking upon each advance in practical science as a retro-gradation in the true utility. Occasionally the poetic intellect—that intellect which we now feel

to have been the most exalted of all—since those truths which to us were of the most enduring importance could only be reached by that *analogy* which speaks in proof-tones to the imagination alone, and to the unaided reason bears no weight—occasionally did this poetic intellect proceed a step farther in the evolving of the vague idea of the philosophic, and find in the mystic parable that tells of the tree of knowledge, and of its forbidden fruit, death-producing, a distinct intimation that knowledge was not meet for man in the infant condition of his soul. And these men—the poets—living and perishing amid the scorn of the "utilitarians"—of rough pedants, who arrogated to themselves a title which could have been properly applied only to the scorned—these men, the poets, pondered piningly, yet not unwisely, upon the ancient days when our wants were not more simple than our enjoyments were keen—days when *mirth* was a word unknown, so solemnly deep-toned was happiness—holy, august and blissful days, when blue rivers ran undamned, between hills unhewn, into far forest solitudes, primæval, odorous, and unexplored.

Yet these noble exceptions from the general misrule served but to strengthen it by opposition. Alas! we had fallen upon the most evil of all our evil days. The great "movement"—that was the cant term—went on: a diseased commotion, moral and physical. Art—the Arts—arose supreme, and, once enthroned, cast chains upon the intellect which had elevated them to power. Man, because he could not but acknowledge the majesty of Nature, fell into childish exultation at his acquired and still-increasing dominion over her elements. Even while he stalked a God in his own

fancy, an infantine imbecility came over him. As might be supposed from the origin of his disorder, he grew infected with system, and with abstraction. He enwrapped himself in generalities. Among other odd ideas, that of universal equality gained ground; and in the face of analogy and of God—in despite of the loud warning voice of the laws of *gradation* so visibly pervading all things in Earth and Heaven—wild attempts at an omni-prevalent Democracy were made. Yet this evil sprang necessarily from the leading evil, Knowledge. Man could not both know and succumb. Meantime huge smoking cities arose, innumerable. Green leaves shrank before the hot breath of furnaces. The fair face of Nature was deformed as with the ravages of some loathsome disease. And methinks, sweet Una, even our slumbering sense of the forced and of the far-fetched might have arrested us here. But now it appears that we had worked out our own destruction in the perversion of our *taste,* or rather in the blind neglect of its culture in the schools.[6] For, in

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[6]"It will be hard to discover a better [method of education] than that which the experience of so many ages has already discovered; and this may be summed up as consisting in gymnastics for the body, and *music* for the soul."—*Repub.* lib. 2. "For this reason is a musical education most essential; since it causes Rhythm and Harmony to penetrate most intimately into the soul, taking the strongest hold upon it, filling *it with beauty and making the man beautiful-minded*....He will praise and admire *the beautiful;* will receive it with joy into his soul, will feed upon it, and *assimilate his own condition with it.*"—*Ibid.* lib. 3. *Music* (μουσική) had, however, among the Athenians, a far more comprehensive signification than with us. It included not only the harmonies of time and of tune, but the poetic diction, sentiment, and creation, each in its widest sense. The study of *music* was with them, in fact, the general cultivation of the taste—of that which recognizes the beautiful—in contra-distinction from reason, which deals only with the true. (Poe's Note.)

truth, it was at this crisis that taste alone—that faculty which, holding a middle position between the pure intellect and the moral sense, could never safely have been disregarded—it was now that taste alone could have led us gently back to Beauty, to Nature, and to Life. But alas for the pure contemplative spirit and majestic intuition of Plato! Alas for the μουσική which he justly regarded as an all-sufficient education for the soul! Alas for him and for it!—since both were so desperately needed when both were most entirely forgotten or despised.

Pascal, a philosopher whom we both love, has said, how truly!— *"que tout notre raisonnement se réduit à céder au sentiment"*; and it is not impossible that the sentiment of the natural, had time permitted it, would have regained its old ascendancy over the harsh mathematical reason of the schools. But this thing was not to be. Prematurely induced by intemperance of knowledge, the old age of the world drew on. This the mass of mankind saw not, or, living lustily although unhappily, affected not to see. But, for myself, the Earth's records had taught me to look for widest ruin as the price of highest civilization. I had imbibed a prescience of our Fate from comparison of China the simple and enduring, with Assyria the architect, with Egypt the astrologer, with Nubia, more crafty than either, the turbulent mother of all Arts. In history[7] of these regions I met with a ray from the Future. The individual artificialities of the three latter were local diseases of the Earth, and in their individual overthrows we had seen local remedies applied; but for the infected world at large I could an-

[7] "History," from ἱστορεῖν, to contemplate. (Poe's Note).

ticipate no regeneration save in death. That man, as a race, should not become extinct, I saw that he must be *"born again."*

And now it was, fairest and dearest, that we wrapped our spirits, daily, in dreams. Now it was that, in twilight, we discoursed of the days to come, when the Art-scarred surface of the Earth, having undergone that purification[8] which alone could efface its rectangular obscenities, should clothe itself anew in the verdure and the mountain-slopes and the smiling waters of Paradise, and be rendered at length a fit dwelling-place for man:—for man the Death-purged—for man to whose now exalted intellect there should be poison in knowledge no more—for the redeemed, regenerated, blissful, and now immortal, but still for the *material,* man.

Una. Well do I remember these conversations, dear Monos; but the epoch of the fiery overthrow was not so near at hand as we believed, and as the corruption you indicate did surely warrant us in believing. Men lived; and died individually. You yourself sickened, and passed into the grave; and thither your constant Una speedily followed you. And though the century which has since elapsed, and whose conclusion brings us thus together once more, tortured our slumbering senses with no impatience of duration, yet, my Monos, it was a century still.

Monos. Say, rather, a point in the vague infinity. Unquestionably, it was in the Earth's dotage that I died. Wearied at heart with anxieties which had their

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[8]The word *"purification"* seems here to be used with reference to its root in the Greek πῦρ, fire. (Poe's Note.)

origin in the general turmoil and decay, I succumbed to the fierce fever. After some few days of pain, and many of dreamy delirium replete with ecstasy, the manifestations of which you mistook for pain, while I longed but was impotent to undeceive you—after some days there came upon me, as you have said, a breathless and motionless torpor and this was termed *Death* by those who stood around me.

Words are vague things. My condition did not deprive me of sentience. It appeared to me not greatly dissimilar to the extreme quiescence of him, who, having slumbered long and profoundly, lying motionless and fully prostrate in a midsummer noon, begins to steal slowly back into consciousness, through the mere sufficiency of his sleep, and without being awakened by external disturbances.

I breathed no longer. The pulses were still. The heart had ceased to beat. Volition had not departed, but was powerless. The senses were unusually active, although eccentrically so—assuming often each other's functions at random. The taste and the smell were inextricably confounded, and became one sentiment, abnormal and intense. The rose-water with which your tenderness had moistened my lips to the last, affected me with sweet fancies of flowers—fantastic flowers, far more lovely than any of the old Earth, but whose prototypes we have here blooming around us. The eyelids, transparent and bloodless, offered no complete impediment to vision. As volition was in abeyance, the balls could not roll in their sockets—but all objects within the range of the visual hemisphere were seen with more or less distinctness; the rays which fell upon the external retina, or into the corner

of the eye, producing a more vivid effect than those which struck the front or interior surface. Yet, in the former instance, this effect was so far anomalous that I appreciated it only as *sound*—sound sweet or discordant as the matters presenting themselves at my side were light or dark in shade—curved or angular in outline. The hearing, at the same time, although excited in degree, was not irregular in action—estimating real sounds with an extravagance of precision, not less than of sensibility. Touch had undergone a modification more peculiar. Its impressions were tardily received, but pertinaciously retained, and resulted always in the highest physical pleasure. Thus the pressure of your sweet fingers upon my eyelids, at first only recognized through vision, at length, long after their removal, filled my whole being with a sensual delight immeasurable. I say with a sensual delight. *All* my perceptions were purely sensual. The materials furnished the passive brain by the senses were not in the least degree wrought into shape by the deceased understanding. Of pain there was some little; of pleasure there was much; but of moral pain or pleasure none at all. Thus your wild sobs floated into my ear with all their mournful cadences, and were appreciated in their every variation of sad tone; but they were soft musical sounds and no more; they conveyed to the extinct reason no intimation of the sorrows which gave them birth; while the large and constant tears which fell upon my face, telling the bystanders of a heart which broke, thrilled every fibre of my frame with ecstasy alone. And this was in truth the *Death* of which these bystanders spoke reverently, in low whispers—you, sweet Una, gaspingly, with loud cries.

They attired me for the coffin—three or four dark figures which flitted busily to and fro. As these crossed the direct line of my vision, they affected me as *forms;* but upon passing to my side their images impressed me with the idea of shrieks, groans, and other dismal expressions of terror, or horror, or of woe. You alone, habited in a white robe, passed in all directions musically about me.

The day waned; and, as its light faded away, I became possessed by a vague uneasiness—an anxiety such as the sleeper feels when sad real sounds fall continuously within his ear—low distant bell-tones, solemn, at long but equal intervals, and commingling with melancholy dreams. Night arrived; and with its shadows a heavy discomfort. It oppressed my limbs with the oppression of some dull weight, and was palpable. There was also a moaning sound, not unlike the distant reverberation of surf, but more continuous, which, beginning with the first twilight, had grown in strength with the darkness. Suddenly lights were brought into the room, and this reverberation became forthwith interrupted into frequent unequal bursts of the same sound, but less dreary and less distinct. The ponderous oppression was in a great measure relieved; and, issuing from the flame of each lamp (for there were many), there flowed unbrokenly into my ears a strain of melodious monotone. And when now, dear Una, approaching the bed upon which I lay outstretched, you sat gently by my side, breathing odour from your sweet lips, and pressing them upon my brow, there arose tremulously within my bosom, and mingled with the merely physical sensations which circumstances had called forth, a something akin to

sentiment itself—a feeling that, half appreciating, half responded to your earnest love and sorrow; but this feeling took no root in the pulseless heart, and seemed indeed rather a shadow than a reality, and faded quickly away, first into extreme quiescence, and then into a purely sensual pleasure as before.

And now, from the wreck and the chaos of the usual senses, there appeared to have arisen within me a sixth, all perfect. In its exercise I found a wild delight—yet a delight still physical, inasmuch as the understanding had in it no part. Motion in the animal frame had fully ceased. No muscle quivered; no nerve thrilled; no artery throbbed. But there seemed to have sprung up in the brain, *that* of which no words could convey to the merely human intelligence even an indistinct conception. Let me term it a mental pendulous pulsation. It was the moral embodiment of man's abstract idea of *Time*. By the absolute equilization of this movement—or of such as this—had the cycles of the firmamental orbs themselves, been adjusted. By its aid I measured the irregularities of the clock upon the mantel, and of the watches of the attendants. Their tickings came sonorously to my ears. The slightest deviations from the true proportion—and these deviations were omniprevalent—affected me just as violations of abstract truth were wont, on earth, to affect the moral sense. Although no two of the time-pieces in the chamber struck the individual seconds accurately together, yet I had no difficulty in holding steadily in mind the tones and the respective momentary errors of each. And this—this keen, perfect, self-existing sentiment of *duration*—this sentiment existing (as man could not possibly have con-

ceived it to exist) independently of any succession of events—this idea—this sixth sense, upspringing from the ashes of the rest, was the first obvious and certain step of the intemporal soul upon the threshold of the temporal Eternity.

It was midnight; and you still sat by my side. All others had departed from the chamber of Death. They had deposited me in the coffin. The lamps burned flickeringly; for this I knew by the tremulousness of the monotonous strains. But, suddenly these strains diminished in distinctness and in volume. Finally they ceased. The perfume in my nostrils died away. Forms affected my vision no longer. The oppression of the Darkness uplifted itself from my bosom. A dull shock like that of electricity pervaded my frame, and was followed by total loss of the idea of contact. All of what man has termed sense was merged in the sole consciousness of entity, and in the one abiding sentiment of duration. The mortal body had been at length stricken with the hand of the deadly *Decay*.

Yet had not all sentience departed; for the consciousness and the sentiment remaining supplied some of its functions by a lethargic intuition. I appreciated the direful change now in operation upon the flesh, and, as the dreamer is sometimes aware of the bodily presence of one who leans over him, so, sweet Una, I still dully felt that you sat by my side. So, too, when the noon of the second day came, I was not unconscious of those movements which displaced you from my side, which confined me within the coffin, which deposited me within the hearse, which bore me to the grave, which lowered me within it, which heaped

heavily the mould upon me, and which thus left me, in blackness and corruption, to my sad and solemn slumbers with the worm.

And here, in the prison-house which has few secrets to disclose, there rolled away days and weeks and months, and the soul watched narrowly each second as it flew, and, without effort, took record of its flight—without effort and without object.

A year passed. The consciousness of *being* had grown hourly more indistinct, and that of mere *locality* had, in great measure, usurped its position. The idea of entity was becoming merged in that of *place*. The narrow space immediately surrounding what had been the body, was now growing to be the body itself. At length, as often happens to the sleeper (by sleep and its world alone is *Death* imaged)—at length, as sometimes happened on Earth to the deep slumberer, when some flitting light half startled him into awaking, yet left him half enveloped in dreams—so to me, in the strict embrace of the *Shadow*, came *that* light which alone might have had power to startle—the light of enduring *Love*. Men toiled at the grave in which I lay darkling. They upthrew the damp earth. Upon my mouldering bones there descended the coffin of Una.

And now again all was void. That nebulous light had been extinguished. That feeble thrill had vibrated itself into quiescence. Many *lustra* had supervened. Dust had returned to dust. The worm had food no more. The sense of being had at length utterly departed, and there reigned in its stead—instead of all things—dominant and perpetual—the autocrats *Place* and *Time*. For *that* which *was not*—for that

which had no form—for that which had no thought—for that which had no sentience—for that which was soulless, yet of which matter formed no portion—for all this nothingness, yet for all this immortality, the grave was still a home, and the corrosive hours, comates.

THE POWER OF WORDS (1845)

[Again two angelic intelligences, children of the fair earth that lately perished, meet and talk of supramundane things. Agathos is inducting Oinos, the spirit newly arrived, into the method of creation. The thought follows closely the lines later developed in *Eureka,* but the conclusion is a leap of fantasy over the walls of analytic reason. Spoken words—so runs the main thread of the exposition—create endless vibrations in the ether and these vibrations modify all existent forms or, to put it differently, create new forms. Now comes the startling terminal thought that the spirit in which words are uttered is also communicated to the resultant new worlds. A turbulent thought, expressed in turbulent words, becomes immundane in a turbulent world. *"The Power of Words,"* says a critic in *The London Times Literary Supplement,* of June 22, 1916, "is worth all Poe's famous stories, including even *The Gold-Bug* or *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt.* It is, in fact, one of the most wonderful pieces of prose in the English language, both for manner and for matter." One sentence of it at least is unsurpassed in ancient or modern English prose. For sheer lift, for sudden overflow into the infinite, I know nothing comparable with this from Agathos: "Come! we will leave to the left the loud harmony of the Pleiades, and

swoop outward from the throne into the starry meadows beyond Orion, where, for pansies and violets, and heart's-ease, are the beds of the triplicate and triple-tinted suns." *The Power of Words* may well close our brief study of Poe's writings. It contains the philosophy of one who believed that Aidenn is the trysting-place not only of dead lovers but of all those homing dreams and far-faring intuitions that feel infinity in their pulses.]

Oinos. Pardon, Agathos, the weakness of a spirit new-fledged with immortality!

Agathos. You have spoken nothing, my Oinos, for which pardon is to be demanded. Not even here is knowledge a thing of intuition. For wisdom ask of the angels freely, that it may be given!

Oinos. But in this existence, I dreamed that I should be at once cognizant of all things, and thus at once happy in being cognizant of all.

Agathos. Ah, not in knowledge is happiness, but in the acquisition of knowledge! In forever knowing, we are forever blessed; but to know all were the curse of a fiend.

Oinos. But does not The Most High know all?

Agathos. *That* (since he is The Most Happy) must be still the *one* thing unknown even to HIM.

Oinos. But, since we grow hourly in knowledge, must not *at last* all things be known?

Agathos. Look down into the abysmal distances! —attempt to force the gaze down the multitudinous vistas of the stars, as we sweep slowly through them thus—and thus—and thus! Even the spiritual vision, is it not at all points arrested by the continuous golden

walls of the universe?—the walls of the myriads of the shining bodies that mere number has appeared to blend into unity?

Oinos. I clearly perceive that the infinity of matter is no dream.

Agathos. There are *no* dreams in Aidenn—but it is here whispered that, of this infinity of matter, the *sole* purpose is to afford infinite springs, at which the soul may allay the thirst to *know* which is forever unquenchable within it—since to quench it would be to extinguish the soul's self. Question me then, my Oinos, freely and without fear. Come! we will leave to the left the loud harmony of the Pleiades, and swoop outward from the throne into the starry meadows beyond Orion, where, for pansies and violets, and heart's-ease, are the beds of the triplicate and triple-tinted suns.

Oinos. And now, Agathos, as we proceed, instruct me! speak to me in the earth's familiar tones! I understood not what you hinted to me, just now, of the modes or of the methods of what, during mortality, we were accustomed to call Creation. Do you mean to say that the Creator is not God?

Agathos. I mean to say that the Deity does not create.

Oinos. Explain!

Agathos. In the beginning *only*, he created. The seeming creatures which are now, throughout the universe, so perpetually springing into being, can only be considered as the mediate or indirect, not as the direct or immediate results of the Divine creative power.

Oinos. Among men, my Agathos, this idea would be considered heretical in the extreme.

Agathos. Among angels, my Oinos, it is seen to be simply true.

Oinos. I can comprehend you thus far—that certain operations of what we term Nature, or the natural laws, will, under certain conditions, give rise to that which has all the *appearance* of creation. Shortly before the final overthrow of the earth, there were, I well remember, many very successful experiments in what some philosophers were weak enough to denominate the creation of animalculæ.

Agathos. The cases of which you speak were, in fact, instances of the secondary creation—and of the *only* species of creation which has ever been, since the first word spoke into existence the first law.

Oinos. Are not the starry worlds that, from the abyss of nonentity, burst hourly forth into the heavens —are not these stars, Agathos, the immediate handiwork of the King?

Agathos. Let me endeavour, my Oinos, to lead you, step by step, to the conception I intend. You are well aware that, as no thought can perish, so no act is without infinite result. We moved our hands, for example, when we were dwellers on the earth, and, in so doing, we gave vibration to the atmosphere which engirdled it. This vibration was indefinitely extended, till it gave impulse to every particle of the earth's air, which thenceforward, *and forever,* was actuated by the one movement of the hand. This fact the mathematicians of our globe well knew. They made the special effects, indeed, wrought in the fluid by special impulses, the subject of exact calculation—so that it became easy to determine in what precise period an impulse of given extent would engirdle the orb, and

impress (forever) every atom of the atmosphere circumambient. Retrograding, they found no difficulty, from a given effect, under given conditions, in determining the value of the original impulse. Now the mathematicians who saw that the results of any given impulse were absolutely endless—and who saw that a portion of these results were accurately traceable through the agency of algebraic analysis—who saw, too, the facility of the retrogradation—these men saw, at the same time, that this species of analysis itself, had within itself a capacity for indefinite progress—that there were no bounds conceivable to its advancement and applicability, except within the intellect of him who advanced or applied it. But at this point our mathematicians paused.

Oinos. And why, Agathos, should they have proceeded?

Agathos. Because there were some considerations of deep interest, beyond. It was deducible from what they knew, that to a being of infinite understanding—one to whom the *perfection* of the algebraic analysis lay unfolded—there could be no difficulty in tracing every impulse given the air—and the ether through the air—to the remotest consequences at any even infinitely remote epoch of time. It is indeed demonstrable that every such impulse *given the air,* must, *in the end,* impress every individual thing that exists *within the universe*;—and the being of infinite understanding—the being whom we have imagined—might trace the remote undulations of the impulse—trace them upward and onward in their influences upon all particles of all matter—upward and onward forever in their modifications of old forms—or in other words *in their creation*

of new—until he found them reflected—unimpressive *at last*—back from the throne of the Godhead. And not only could such a being do this, but at any epoch, should a given result be afforded him—should one of these numberless comets, for example, be presented to his inspection—he could have no difficulty in determining, by the analytic retrogradation, to what original impulse it was due. This power of retrogradation in its absolute fulness and perfection—this faculty of referring at *all* epochs, *all* effects to *all* causes—is of course the prerogative of the Deity alone —but in every variety of degree, short of the absolute perfection, is the power itself exercised by the whole host of the Angelic Intelligences.

Oinos. But you speak merely of impulses upon the air.

Agathos. In speaking of the air, I referred only to the earth:—but the general proposition has reference to impulses upon the ether—which, since it pervades, and alone pervades all space, is thus the great medium of *creation.*

Oinos. Then all motion, of whatever nature, creates?

Agathos. It must: but a true philosophy has long taught that the source of all motion is thought—and the source of all thought is—

Oinos. God.

Agathos. I have spoken to you, Oinos, as to a child of the fair Earth which lately perished—of impulses upon the atmosphere of the Earth.

Oinos. You did.

Agathos. And while I thus spoke, did there not

cross your mind some thought of the *physical power of words*? Is not every word an impulse on the air?

Oinos. But why, Agathos, do you weep?—and why—oh why do your wings droop as we hover above this fair star—which is the greenest and yet most terrible of all we have encountered in our flight? Its brilliant flowers look like a fairy dream—but its fierce volcanoes like the passions of a turbulent heart.

Agathos. They *are*!—they *are*! This wild star—it is now three centuries since with clasped hands, and with streaming eyes, at the feet of my beloved—I spoke it—with a few passionate sentences—into birth. Its brilliant flowers *are* the dearest of all unfulfilled dreams, and its raging volcanoes *are* the passions of the most turbulent and unhallowed of hearts.

THE END

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